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ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE (EMC)

H474

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Contents

Introduction

Our examiners' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the examinations. They provide useful guidance for future candidates.

The reports will include a general commentary on candidates' performance, identify technical aspects examined in the questions and highlight good performance and where performance could be improved. A selection of candidate answers is also provided. The reports will also explain aspects which caused difficulty and why the difficulties arose, whether through a lack of knowledge, poor examination technique, or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

Where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report.

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Paper 3 series overview

Paper 3, 'Reading as a writer, writing as a reader,' asks candidates to engage critically with the novel they have studied to demonstrate understanding of an aspect of narrative, before changing tack and producing the opening to a story that showcases creativity and an understanding of narrative construction. Additionally, candidates must evaluate their own writing through a commentary that explores the choices made in terms of language, form, and structure. It is quite a challenge within the context of a two-hour exam. Many candidates have again risen to the challenge impressively in this series, while others have struggled to transition between these different approaches: the analytical, the informed-creative, and the reflective/analytical.

Section A tasks reward candidates who directly engage with the aspect of narrative identified in Question 1 or 2; this year how the ending of the novel provides resolution, or the way the writer has used characterisation. Both questions were accessible to candidates, and the strongest work focused consistently on the task and provided examples from across their chosen novel. Section A tasks are assessed against AO1, AO2, and AO3. AO1 and AO2 work hand-in-hand with the identification of a method and concept being employed, leading to an exploration of the meanings created. Candidates are also rewarded for AO1 achievement by writing in a consistently clear and coherent manner. AO3 reflects the relation of the text studied to the contexts of production and reception in which it exists. The first of these contexts, that of production, tends to dominate in candidate responses, with information drawn from biographical, historical, and cultural sources taking precedence over considerations of genre and the active role a reader has in constructing meanings influenced by their own beliefs and cultural frameworks. In Section A, *The Great Gatsby* was by far the most popular text studied. Among the other choices, *Atonement, Jane Eyre,* and *Things Fall Apart* were offered in similar numbers to each other, followed by a very small number of responses to *The Namesake* and *The God of Small Things.*

Section B work at its best was creative, informed, reflective, and analytical across Question 3(a) and (b). AO5 achievement in Question 3(a) rewards creativity and control in the production of engaging effects in story-writing. This was best achieved by those candidates who had a clear sense of what the opening of a story needs to do in terms of setting the narrative in motion and engaging a reader. Given that Question 3(a) will always ask candidates to produce the **opening** of a narrative, it is reasonable to expect them to have a clear sense of the generic expectations of openings and to demonstrate this in 3(a) and reflect upon its achievement in 3(b). Examiners also expect candidates to engage sincerely with the storyline prompts and the narrative arc implied by them, and the vast majority of responses sought to do this. Further comments on this issue are provided later in this report.

Candidates who did well on Section A of this paper:	Candidates who did less well on Section A of this paper:
- planned carefully, especially in defining the Q1 or Q2 topic area - focused directly on the chosen aspect of narrative throughout the response - created AO1/AO2 links in which identification of a concept or method led directly to an exploration of meanings - used quotation and whole-text references to support the argument - integrated relevant contextual material to elucidate meanings and inform interpretations - wrote in a clear, fluent and economical manner.	- wrote in a generalised way around an undefined topic - included discussion of material that was extraneous to the topic area - were descriptive rather than analytical in approach to language, form and structure - did not demonstrate secure whole-novel knowledge and used a limited range of references and quotations - used contextual material in a generalised or indiscriminate way - were inconsistent in written expression, clarity and accuracy.

Candidates who did well on Section B of this paper:	Candidates who did less well on Section B of this paper:
- had a very clear sense of ways in which openings to stories work - planned how the prompts would be incorporated and manipulated - were often character-led, wry and understated in approach - created a sense of progression and movement in the narrative - used rhetorical devices in a light-touch manner - used the commentary to reflect on outcomes rather than intentions, and explored aspects of form, language and structure in some detail.	- did not sufficiently understand the conventions of narrative openings - left the reader unanchored as to what was happening, where and to whom by writing in a stream of consciousness style - used fantasy or horror tropes in a heavy-handed way - wrote too much, giving the sense of the narrative running away; more time spent planning and less writing might have helped with this - wrote a commentary that was very brief, or generalised or was merely a checklist of methods employed.

Section A overview

In Section A responses, a full range of achievement was evidenced. The most effective and accomplished work demonstrated a comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the studied novel. Many candidates showcased great ability in applying that knowledge to one of the two aspects of narrative under consideration. Utilising the text effectively in an open-book examination is a skill in itself, and many candidates impressed with their ability to select and explore a wide range of appropriate quotations and textual references. The strongest responses skilfully marshalled evidence to explore the question in detail. Both Q1 and Q2 proved accessible to candidates, with Q2 proving the more popular.

All the examined texts seen offered ample opportunities for responses at all levels of achievement. Many answers included comments on genre features and the assumed intentions of the authors regarding meaning. Among the more successful responses, *The Great Gatsby* was almost universally perceived as a social commentary; *Things Fall Apart* as a political and literary commentary; *Jane Eyre* as a feminist commentary; and *Atonement* as post-modern (self-reflexive) metafiction. This led to purposeful discussion and exemplified the candidates' growing confidence in incorporating consideration of genre contexts into their responses

Many candidates thoroughly investigated their chosen aspect of narrative, constructing convincing and cohesive arguments (AO1). The application of methods and terminology from both linguistic and literary approaches, in order to analyse meanings, characterised the strongest work (AO1/AO2). There appears to be a genuine improvement year-on-year in the candidates' utilisation of relevant contextual material to inform interpretations (AO3). This year, there were fewer instances of candidates including large amounts of borderline relevant historical and biographical detail. Instead, there was a more purposeful consideration of genre contexts such as the post-colonial/modernist/post-modernist/country-house novel, which genuinely illuminated the discussions. While contextual information drawn from biographical, historical, and cultural sources is valuable, it is best employed with a light touch. Recognising that these influences can inform our understanding of character in action is certainly valid, but attributing character behaviour solely to these factors is less so.

A key message for Paper 3 Section A

Time spent by candidates in the exam room, reflecting on the question topic before starting writing, is time well spent. It is perfectly legitimate to use the first page of the answer booklet for planning, and some of the strongest responses seen this summer followed this preparation.

For Question 1, it was valuable for candidates to define, in their own minds, a response to two key questions: what are the parameters of 'the ending' of the novel they have studied; and what ways does that section constitute a 'resolution' to the narrative?

For Question 2, candidates could usefully reflect, in general terms, on what is meant by 'characterisation' - particularly how characters are introduced, develop, and interact with others in their novel - as well as how themes and ideas are expressed through them.

The results of such thinking across both questions could then inform the opening paragraph of the response, setting the terms of the discussion to follow and orientating candidate - and examiner - response.

Question 1

Reading as a writer

1 In what ways does the ending of the novel provide a resolution of its narrative?

You should range across the text to explore how features such as character, setting and viewpoint are presented during the final stages of the novel, the function the ending plays in the novel as a whole, and the broader generic context. **[32]**

Question 1 was answered less frequently than Question 2, but candidates who did respond found ample material to discuss regarding how the ending of their chosen novel operated and the extent to which it resolved the narrative.

A question that concentrates on the impact of a specific part of the novel, albeit in the light of what led up to it, could be viewed as particularly helpful in the context of an open-book exam. Once candidates determined which section they considered to be 'the ending' within the final stages of their chosen novel, they had a discrete portion of the text before them to explore (as opposed to potentially spanning the entire novel in Question 2). Those candidates who possessed a strong understanding of their text's ending and were able to provide a well-balanced interpretation of its significance performed well on this question.

At lower levels, all candidates who tackled this question were able to reflect on the events that unfolded at the end of the novel they had studied and how they might constitute a resolution. Some candidates did approach the ending from a rather too distant vantage point, tracing events from the opening pages (and throughout) before finally addressing their impact at the conclusion; when presented with a discrete section of the novel to discuss, it is sensible to maintain a relatively focused exploration of it.

Exemplar 1

1		The ending of the Great Gatsby provides a resolution of its narrative through the quiet deaths of the novel's recurring motifs, through its narrative voice, through setting, and through characterisation. A range of stylistic techniques are used to provide narrative closure, and the tone of the Great Gatsby's ~~resolu~~ ending is consistent with the narrative.

Fitzgerald provides ~~resolution with several~~ closure with almost every symbol throughout the novel. The green light, first introduced ~~in chapter~~ at the end of chapter one - with "I glanced seaward and distinguished nothing except a single green light" along with the character Gatsby. ~~Sym~~ Used to symbolise hope, fantasy, and ~~something more than what is~~. the idea of reaching for something more than what you have, the green light is extinguished in chapter five, when Gatsby reunites with Daisy, the object of his greatest desires and delusions: "the colossal significance of that light had now vanished forever." In the final pages of the book, Fitzgerald returns to the green light, with Nick's narration stating that "Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgiastic future that recedes year by year before us... stretch out our arms farther...", ~~with~~ directly referencing the introductory chapter's "he stretched out his arms towards the dark water in a curious way", creating resolution through chiastic parallel. Fitzgerald also refers back to his use of time as a symbol, specifically Gatsby's ~~response to~~ Nick's "~~you can't repeat the past~~" ~~as~~ "Can't repeat the past... Why of course you can!" in chapter six, and to Gatsby dropping a clock in chapter five when he saw Daisy, as though time had stopped. Fitzgerald creates resolution ~~by~~ in the novel's ~~finally~~ final lines,

writing that time will outpace us all, ending the Great Gatsby with the metaphor "So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past." The adverb 'ceaselessly' in combination with the reference to the past, provides a perfect account of the powerlessness and doomed repetition of the novel, creating an appropriate resolution. This choice of conclusion may also have been influenced by the era in which Fitzgerald wrote, as the 1920s in America was witnessing rapid change and social division per the advent of modern capitalism, and how human the prolificacy of human carelessness seemed almost impossible to stop.

Fitzgerald also uses narration to provide resolution, reverting back to the present tense in the final line, "so we beat on", just as the novel had opened in the present tense. With the main body of the Great Gatsby narrated in the past tense as a retrospective, this change in voice denotes a conclusion of some kind, a resolution through stylistic cyclicism to demonstrate that the story ends where it began and never would have ended any other way. The majority of the Great Gatsby's ending is narrated in retrospectively to serve as a reflection, and Fitzgerald's decision to change tense only in the final line, especially during a line about the past, ~~after~~ provides resolution. ~~with the novel's~~ summative theme of ~~looking to change~~. Resolution is also found in the ~~margin~~ Great Gatsby's ending by way of setting: Gatsby's house, initially described as the epitome of roaring twenties opulence, ~~~~ is described only as "still empty". In stark contrast to the

vibrant descriptions of chapter three, like "several hundred feet of canvas and enough coloured lights to make a Christmas tree of Gatsby's enormous garden", and "the swirls and eddies of people", "the bar is in full swing", and "the air is alive", Fitzgerald's final words on Gatsby's house are simple and few. No longer personifying the air, or using the idiomatic phrase 'full swing' to create the image of Gatsby's house and its atmosphere, Fitzgerald uses the state of Gatsby's house to reflect Gatsby himself - the beating heart of the New Age reduced to nothing, and seemingly forgotten by all but Nick. This provides a resolution by reiterating the novel's theme of the carelessness of the Manhattan socialite class, and Nick's aversion towards it.

Fitzgerald also uses characterisation his characterisation of Nick to provide resolution. With Nick initially going to great ends to establish his credibility as a narrator in chapter one, "I'm inclined to reserve all judgments", he immediately follows this with the concession that "when I came back from the East last autumn, I felt that I wanted the world... moral attention forever." By setting this up at the very beginning of the Great Gatsby, Fitzgerald is able to use Nick's growing cynicism as a mirror and result of the escalating plot. At the novel's end, Nick describes Tom and Daisy as "careless people... [who] smashed up things and money creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness", showing how he reaches the limits of his moral tolerance, just as he had warned at the novel's opening, providing resolution in this way.

Through concluded motifs, narration, setting, and characterisation, Fitzgerald creates a resolution both stylistic and thematic resolution to the Great Gatsby, ending the novel as it began, and reiterating the lessons of the story.

> This candidate explores the ending of *The Great Gatsby* as resolution in an extremely effective way with a consistently clear and fluent expression of ideas. The opening focuses from the outset on both the question and the narrative techniques to be considered. The discussion of the use of symbols in the resolution - the green light and time - is handled very well, with their use earlier in the novel referenced with considerable deftness before consideration of their function in the ending. The exploration of narrative perspectives (particularly around changes of tense from present to past and back to present) characterisation and setting is similarly purposeful and focused. Quotation and textual references are apposite, brief and integrated into the discussion. The consideration of contextual information on the impact of the era in which Fitzgerald was writing is adroit and purposeful. The way in which the response is structured is also very clear and effective. The response is both methodical and economical and demonstrates just what can be achieved in slightly over three pages of the answer booklet. This is Level 6 work.

Jane Eyre

There were some superb analyses of the multiple closures of the novel. Successful candidates considered issues such as:

- how Jane's reunion with Mr Rochester, and subsequent marriage to him, provide a sense of closure to their tumultuous relationship

- how Mr Rochester's initial blindness, physical transformation and the civilising power of his suffering, coupled with Jane's new-found financial independence, create a marriage of equality

- the emotional and proto-feminist satisfaction for the reader of such a conclusion (in this light many candidates gave due weight to the syntax of 'Reader, I married him'.)

- how the novel closes with Jane's report on St. John Rivers and his selfless devotion to duty in the aftermath of Jane's rejection of his marriage proposal, perhaps to placate the pieties of Bronte's Victorian readership.

The Great Gatsby

Weaker responses to this question tended to respond along the lines of 'How does *The Great Gatsby* end?', while stronger ones really thought about what 'resolution' might mean, and how problems in the text find resolution - if they are resolved at all. Successful responses explored such issues as:

- how the death and destruction we witness at the end of the novel reveals full disillusionment with the American Dream

- how Daisy and Tom's departure demonstrates their true natures and the falsity of Gatsby's romantic attachment to Daisy

- how the lonely funeral for Gatsby, attended only by Nick, Gatsby's father and Owl Eyes, proves the insincerity and shallowness of those who earlier flocked to his parties and how Gatsby's father's testimony adds further pathos to his demise

- how the green light comes to symbolise the illusory nature of Gatsby's dreams and a link to the larger themes of disillusionment and loss in the novel

- how Nick's final observation 'So we beat on, boats against the current, borne ceaselessly into the past' suggests the cyclical nature of human behaviour and that the past is inescapable.

Things Fall Apart

Candidates tend to write well about *Things Fall Apart* generally, often with foregrounded literary and political consideration of the text as a post-colonial 'write-back' to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and the literary tradition it represents. This question on the ending of the novel produced many strong responses, in which candidates considered:

- Okonkwo as an Aristotelian tragic hero with hamartia, peripeteia, anagnorisis and catharsis at his death
- Okonkwo's suicide bringing a closure to his character arc through his inability to adapt to the changes brought about by colonisation
- the profound impact of colonisation on the Igbo people and the destruction of a once-thriving community
- Achebe's angry portrayal of the District Commissioner and the missionaries at the close of the novel and their arrogance, ignorance and disregard for the tragedy of Okonkwo and the Igbo people.

Atonement

It can be challenging for candidates to grasp the structure of *Atonement*, and in writing about the ending less strong responses tended to trace the narrative too far back. This led to quite a lot of re-telling of the story. More successful responses handled the revelation that the narration is in fact doubly untrue - it is, after all, a fiction by McEwan and within that it is a fiction shaped by Bryony in order to achieve her atonement. This argument required clarity and care to lay out. The idea of who gets poetic justice in the novel was used by a number of weaker candidates, forgetting that these characters are simply constructs. Stronger responses to this question considered:

- how the revelation of Bryony as the 'author' shifts the viewpoint from objective third person to a subjective and self-reflective one
- Bryony's decision to re-write events to create a happy future for Cecilia and Robbie offers a form of atonement for her earlier false accusations
- the revelations about Bryony's authorship raises questions about the reliability of storytelling and the power of narrative to shape reality.

Question 2

2   In what ways does the writer use characterisation to shape the narrative?

You should range across the text to explore how character contributes to the structure of the narrative, the function character plays in the novel as a whole, and the broader generic context.

[32]

Question 2 was a very popular choice for candidates and the question offered ample opportunity for achievement from all candidates. Stronger responses were able to link characters to narrative structure, seeing characters as drivers of the narrative, and beyond that to symbols and meaning. These candidates explored how the authors had created characters that are well-rounded and believable and in whom a reader could invest emotionally, and considered how character behaviour, motivation and relationships contribute to the themes and ideas of the novel.

In lower-level responses, candidates tended to write about just a few significant characters. There was some tendency to view these characters as if real rather than as constructs with a narrative function, which can lead to a sense of their being static and quite narrowly definable, rather than as evolving through the narrative. Some responses spent a lot of time describing what characters do and say in a way that became close to a re-telling of the story.

Jane Eyre

Jane Eyre is a substantial novel and candidates were under some pressure to select appropriate examples from such a long narrative. The Bildungsroman approach was relatively successful so long as candidates steered clear of trying to narrate the story and kept the focus on the idea of how characterisation shapes the narrative. Successful responses often focused on the picaresque-type structuring of the novel and the ways in which Jane's response to the various settings – Gateshead Hall, Lowood Institution, Thornfield Hall, Ferndean Manor - helped to define the narrative progression. This is an important part of Bronte's structuring technique and it led to better outcomes than those responses which simply gave character portraits of various characters and described their interactions. Stronger responses considered such issues as:

- Jane's Bildungsroman journey and her strong-willed nature as pivotal to the novel's themes of resilience, love and the pursuit of personal identity

- Mr Rochester's complex characterisation with his mysterious past and brooding demeanour coupled to his hidden vulnerability adding to the novel's sense of mystery and romance

- how St. John Rivers' inflexible nature and emotional constraint contrast with Jane's fiery passion and emotional depth, and how his qualities of reason, duty, self-denial and piety reflect societal values of the time.

The Great Gatsby

Although a relatively short novel, *The Great Gatsby* is complex and subtle, and the most successful responses focused on the different kinds of characterisation. There are a large cast of characters in the novel that could be considered minor and we do not see the narrative from their viewpoint, but they bring movement and dynamism through their interactions and bring context into play. Myrtle, Tom, and Wilson all fall into these types. Gatsby himself is constructed before our eyes and is presented by Nick, and the most successful responses showed how Fitzgerald's homodiegetic narrator produces the enigmatic and shifting impressions of Gatsby. That Gatsby's dream of Daisy shapes the entire narrative was a key idea for successful responses. Nick's own character was often brought into the analysis. He is the most complex of all the characters and his narration literally *is* the narrative so has a major impact on its shaping. Successful responses had to tread a narrow line between making the essay entirely about narrative technique and exploring the creation of Nick's character as a major filter on the events. He shapes perceptions rather than events - he rarely intervenes except as a listener but we only see what is filtered through his focus. Weaker responses quickly lost the idea of 'shaping' and became lists of characters with what they contributed in straightforward terms or sometimes simply what happened to them. Some other aspects of the topic thoughtfully addressed were:

- the characterisation of Gatsby being used to explore themes of the American Dream and the illusory nature of success

- Daisy as a symbol of the elite monied class, embodying both the allure of wealth and the shallowness and moral ambiguity of this strata of society

- Tom Buchanan as representative of old money and traditional – and reprehensible – values, and how his characterisation highlights themes of entitlement, arrogance and the corruption of the wealthy

Things Fall Apart

There were some very successful responses to this question. The simplicity of the narrative and the centrality of Okonkwo made for some cogent and focused responses. There was some smooth linking of the character with the fate of Umuofia itself so that characterisation and setting were symbolically connected. Exploration of the strong family and tribal relationships and the fact there are just a handful of central defining moments also made for successful analysis of the way that events and challenges are shaped by character (and also shape character). Some other thoughtfully addressed issues were:

- how the characterisation of Okonkwo demonstrates the challenge of maintaining cultural identity in a changing world

- Okonkwo's presentation as a proud and ambitious man, with the fatal flaw of fear of being perceived as weak leading to his downfall

- how the presentation of Okonkwo's daughter Enzima with all her strength and intelligence sheds light on rigid gender roles in Igbo society

- characters such as Obierika and Uchendu representing the values, wisdom and communal bonds of Igbo culture.

Atonement

Atonement presented challenges in that it is a complex narrative spanning a long sequence of time and encompassing different novelistic techniques. Successful responses tended to focus on the presentation of Bryony's character in the early part of the novel, and showed how that character went on to the shape the narrative through her impact on characters around her. There was effective discussion of how Bryony seeks to achieve in her narrative what she can't achieve in reality. The controlling aspect of her character was explored in a number of successful responses. Weaker responses were drawn into narrative re-telling in places and lost focus on the 'shape the narrative' aspect of the question. There was much effective commentary on:

* the use of multiple narrators in the novel, each with their own biases, to highlight the subjectivity of truth and memory
* how characters are used to convey themes of guilt and redemption in the novel`
* the use of character to explore complexities of class and gender hierarchies and the constraints these impose
* how the complex characterisation of Bryony, Cecilia and Robbie reveal human relationships in all their uncertainty and ambiguity.

Section B overview

The performance in Section B showed a diverse range of achievements in both creating a narrative opening (Question 3(a)) and providing commentary on it (Question 3(b)). The most successful responses for Question 3(a) demonstrated a clear understanding of how a story opening functions. This understanding may have been derived from studying the novel for this component and also from candidates' broader reading experience. However, not all responses in this series convinced examiners of a deep knowledge of these conventions. Question 3(a) is essentially a micro-task, challenging candidates to create an opening within a limited word count of around 500 words. This opening should embed the prompts, establish character, setting, and event, and convey the sense of narrative progression. Moreover, the writing must be clear, accurate, and engaging to the reader.

To develop performance in this task, candidates may benefit from studying a range of shorter fiction to refine their understanding of effective techniques and develop their sense of an impactful style. Reading short stories by writers such as Raymond Carver, Alice Munro, Grace Paley, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, or flash fiction by Lydia Davis or George Saunders, for example, could be really helpful in helping candidates understand how much can be achieved in relatively few words.

It seemed that this year there were more examples of quite long responses to the storyline prompts. Candidates should only spend around 40 minutes on this task, and those who wrote several pages tended to demonstrate a lack of control and crafting in their writing. More, in this case, is likely to equate to less in terms of quality. It should be possible for candidates to fulfil all the requirements of 3(a) in a couple of pages of the answer booklet.

Regarding the use of storyline prompts, changes to the mark scheme and communications with centres this year have made it clear that candidates must use the prompts in a meaningful way. Failure to engage with the storyline arc implied by the prompts will result in a mark no higher than Level 2 for Question 3(a) being awarded. This also affects the marks available for 3(b), where responses that haven't engaged with the prompts in the way required of Question 3(a) will be self-penalising, with marks capped at Level 2. Fortunately, few candidates fell foul of this requirement, but some did. These were instances where examiners could find either no connection between the writing produced and the prompts, or the connection was too slight or tangential to be meaningful. For example, creating a character called Riley who exists in a narrative entirely removed from the context of floating up bejewelled staircases with unhappy-looking people descending alongside, couldn't be enough; or having a seawall appear in the background of a story with no Charlie, Dad or warnings of rising sea levels would not fulfil the requirement. Both of these examples did appear in this session.

A key message for Paper 3 Section B

Candidates should consider the reader's generic expectations for the **opening** of a story. These expectations typically include an arresting opening with a possible 'hook'; an introduction to the main character(s) and/or setting; an inciting incident that propels the narrative; foreshadowing of future events; and the use of clear and engaging language.

Given these expectations, the very popular decision to start the story *in medias res* may not be the best approach. While beginning in the middle of things can create immediacy and intrigue in a complete narrative, it does rely on subsequent exposition, flashbacks, and character development to gradually reveal missing background details and allow the reader to piece the narrative together. With only a 500-word opening to be produced, these subsequent processes are not possible, which can result in an opening that is perplexing to the reader.

Question 3 (a)

Writing as a reader

3   (a)   Choose **one** of the storylines opposite to develop as the **opening** of a narrative.

Write your narrative, making your own choices about the story's starting point and linguistic techniques. You are writing the **opening** to a narrative, and can use any one of the bullet points as the beginning of your story. You are not expected to write the full story.

You should write approximately 500 words.   **[18]**

Either

Storyline 1

- Dad showed his child a mark he had carved on the sea-wall. Beneath it was another mark, green with age.

- 'That is where the sea level was when I was a boy.' He pointed to the lower mark. 'This is where it reaches now.'

- It was centimetres higher.

- Charlie asked who was responsible. 'I am,' said Dad. 'You are. Everyone is. No-one has looked after the environment.'

- Something snapped in Charlie. 'I'm not responsible! And I promise you, that tide will turn, and never get any higher, as long as I live.'

- Dad smiled, thinking Charlie was very, very young.

Or

Storyline 2

- The stairway was wide, the treads inlaid with precious stones.

- Though the steps were steep, you did not need to strain to climb them. You just floated upwards. But you couldn't go back down, even if you wanted to.

- For that, there was a second stairway, just over to the left.

- That one was a moving stairway.

- Every few minutes, someone passed Riley on it, going down.

- Oddly Riley knew all of these people. And none of them looked happy.

> **Storyline 1**
>
> Although less popular than the second option, this was undertaken with enthusiasm by many candidates. Overall, examiners felt it generated more successful writing than Storyline 2.
>
> The prompts understandably led many candidates to explore issues of climate change and rising sea levels. Many young people, rightfully, feel strongly about these issues, and many candidates relished the opportunity to explore this topic creatively, often demonstrating substantial knowledge and understanding. Several candidates manipulated chronology interestingly, portraying events at the seawall in Charlie's childhood, while the narrative, set in the present day, dealt with some of the consequences of their promise to 'turn the tide'. Others chose to recreate the scene from either Charlie or Dad's perspective, and there was thoughtful characterisation of both these figures. Some candidates effectively conveyed the child's shock at being implicated in negative processes beyond their control. There was also some excellent descriptive writing about the seashore, beaches, seawalls, and the sea itself, often foregrounding other indicators of environmental damage through despoliation caused by discarded plastic and other debris.

Exemplar 2

13a B

Only now as I write this, many years later, can I fully appreciate the sentiment my Dad was trying to instill in me.

From what I can remember, in my twilight years, it was a cold, blistery cold, crispy and chilly morning. A quiet seaside town on a regular day, like any other. Yet, so extraordinary, so extraordinarly ordinary. Everything about where I was seemed to me of the time inconsequencial. Little did little we know, but this would be oh so very consequencial. Within this ordinary town was an ordinary coastline. Alongside this ordinary coastline was, now at least, an extraordinary seawall. It lay low and limp amongst the tide, battered, and bruised.

Firmly placed in my father's lap, I watched as his hand guided mine through the caverns and canyons of the cracks in the wall. My

hand, getting cold and bored of the ~~twitching~~ icy shield until it stopped. My hand halted its advance on a line. It was chipped, wounded by the ~~ever~~ never present ~~coming~~ tide. Yet, it still was visible. ~~As I looked up at my Dad father in confusion he simply said~~ Less visible was a mark I could barely see under the white noise of the surf. A ~~slightly~~ greener mark, weary with age, broken and ~~not~~ defeated. Even to naive me, of a tender age could understand this was a relic of a time to be studied, not to be ~~recreated~~ relived outside of a page.

I looked up at my ~~father~~, looking down he could see his entire world within his ~~any~~ arms, asking no begging for answers as to the nature of the long ~~forgotten~~ green mark. Softly and ~~sweetly~~ sweetly, almost melancholic he spoke to me. "That is where the sea level was when I was a boy." Raising a finger in direction, leading my curious eyes to the higher mark, he spoke to me again "This is where it reaches now." It was centimetres higher.

In my ~~if~~ infancy, I do not, looking back, ~~belier~~ believe I grasped the idea, at least not fully, of what had been said to me. However, ~~and~~ I must interject and emphasise the importance

of what has been told to me. As I am surely aware you know, just how dire the consequences are that lie before me later in life as a result of this statement.

Demonstrating my inability to grasp the situational tone laid out by my father, a young misunderstood and emotionally confused Charlie asked who was responsible. I got the response back that "I am".

This an effective opening to a narrative. It opens in an arresting way and references the prompts from the outset. The use of time here, with the events on the beach being viewed by Charlie from the perspective of adulthood, is effective and engaging. Memories of the past event are rendered in a believable manner ('From what I can remember, in my twilight years, it was a cold, blustery…') with adverbials of time ('on a regular day like any other' making the event specific. The use of the oxymoron 'so extraordinarily ordinary' is engaging and creates) intrigue for the reader. The piece sets up events to come later in the story: 'Everything about where I was seemed to me at the time to be inconsequential. Little did little me know, but this would be oh so consequential' is knowing and quite comic. There is a playful quality to the writing that is engaging ('Demonstrating my inability to grasp the situational tone laid out by my father a young, misunderstood and emotionally confused Charlie said…') conveying the sense of the adult narrator looking back on his childhood self and only half-comprehending what he sees. There is some loss of narrative propulsion on the second page but overall it is controlled and creative and demonstrates a well-developed understanding of the ways in which meanings are shaped. This is Level 5 work.

Storyline 2

The prompts were more abstract than those of Storyline 1 and suggested a fantasy genre to many candidates. A significant number of them were familiar with the conventions of such writing and engaged with the prompts in an enthusiastic way. Others perhaps were drawing on fantasy video-game tropes in the creation of the immersive world in which Riley was existing. In some instances, this led to writing that was rather opaque, with the fantastic worlds conceived by the writer not being so readily explicable to the reader. Employing a stream of consciousness style did tend to compound these problems. In some other instances, the writing was rather mannered, with one effect piled on another as Riley's world becomes ever more surreal and their situation increasingly perilous. In such instances, the methods employed tended to obscure rather than illuminate meaning and could act as a barrier to reader engagement.

Some creative responses were held back by lack of paragraphing and basics of effective writing. Examiners always comment on the challenge students face with this element of the component but are often very impressed by how well they rise to it. It is often writing that is pared back and restrained that impresses more than the highly embellished. George Orwell's maxim that 'good writing is like a windowpane' always seems such a good guide.

Question 3 (b)

(b) Write a commentary on the narrative opening you have produced in 3(a).

Explain the narrative and linguistic choices you have made in response to the storyline prompts.

You should write approximately 250 words.   **[14]**

Question 3(b) has 14 marks available. The best commentaries manage to strike a balance between using the commentary as a space for reflection on narrative choices and engaging in critical analysis of effects chosen and their impact on meaning. Commentaries do tend to reflect levels of linguistic learning, and the strongest identify and explore a range of methods utilised, just as is appropriate in textual study in other components of this A level. Examiner annotation of the strongest 3(b) work shows repeated AO1 and AO2 linkages. At its best this work is really impressive, with the commentary responding to, and being in conversation with, the narrative writing and by doing so illuminating it. For this reason some examiners will read the commentary first to gain insight into the candidate's intentions for their writing.

But many commentaries were disappointing. Many of them are really quite short with candidates producing nearer 150 than 250 words. These pieces could feel like something of an afterthought. In some instances, these short commentaries followed overly long narratives and it seemed likely this was caused by an exam time-management problem. Some commentaries were reflective on the challenges of creating the narrative but had little or no linguistic identification. Others listed techniques used but didn't exemplify or explore the impact on meaning. Candidates could helpfully be reminded that the commentary should follow, rather than drive, the narrative and should reflect on what has been achieved and how that was done.

Exams are stressful for young people and students naturally want to prepare as fully as they can. Section B overall is difficult to revise for in the traditional way, as strong achievement tends to reflect embedded learning of narrative techniques developed through the work for the A level overall, wider reading, the ability to apply concepts and methods and critically analyse meanings. It is understandable that candidates might prepare in advance the methods they are going to identify in the commentary and then embed these same methods in their narrative, but it is rarely the best strategy. It can lead to stylistically overwrought writing that works against clarity and impact, and also prove something of a straitjacket in terms of a fresh and creative engagement with the prompts. In these cases commentaries don't quite ring true, and there is a feeling of disconnect with the creative processes engaged with in the first part of Question 3.

Exemplar 3

6　In my narrative I attempted to convey the dangers of AI and virtual reality. I immerse the reader by using the first person tense, "I stopped" and fragmented, minor sentences, 'one step at a time' to create a conversational like tone. Furthermore, colloquialisms such as 'bloody hell' exclamatory utterances-'That's it!'- build this informal sense of immersion. However, this first-person homodiegetic narrative shifts to a different character through syntactic parallelism -'Riley Screamed...' This shift helps portray the state of illusion and fantasy that Riley is in.

Fantasy-illusion and reality are a narrative motif in this opening. The referral to 'two contrary states' and evolving, a syndetic tautology -' wet, moist, liquid water' reflect the deluded state that Riley feels in this video-game/virtual world. Subtle foreshadowing of this virtual reality are employed by the references to 'world outside world', 'This place','realm', 'technology'. Furthermore, polyptotons such as 'natural nature' emphasise the loose grip on reality. The opposing stairs are a synecdoche for these contrary states, one with a 'gliding' 'fake smile' and another with descending frowns.

I employed sensory imagery to create further immersion. The consonant plosive-lateral 'gl' sound is used 'glistening girded', 'glided', 'glasses glittered' to create a vivid, harsh setting contrasting the reality. the softness of 'l' with the harsh reality of 'gl'. Further sound descriptions and use of synaesthesia 'crescendo of light' - highlight the confusing sensory feelings in this virtual world.

I attempted to build tension by starting in media res with the fronted conjunction 'And' to immediately hook the reader with the protagonist. The tricolon, 'stopped. breathed. Glanced' provides a dramatic pause until exposition of the setting begins. Imagery of nature through the pleonastic polyptoton 'Flowers and tulips...' juxtapose the technological world of AI. Furthermore, the zeugma, 'my mind shifted and so did my neck' emphasise the immersive state Riley feels and builds a vivid description of the power of future technology.

This commentary is very detailed and effective. It is straight to the point in identifying the thematic concerns of the narrative ('In my narrative I attempted to convey the dangers of AI and virtual reality'). This is a confident opening that conveys a clear sense of purpose in the identification of the central thematic concern of the story. A wide range of methods are identified and in all instances the feature is either illustrated with an example from the narrative or is explored in terms of the meanings created.

The examples of methods employed are very interesting, with familiar ones (the 'homodiegetic narrator' creating a writerly link with the Section A text for which the candidate was 'reader'), balanced against the more exotic (polyptotons and zeugma). In each case the feature is correctly identified and exemplified. This is Level 6 work that demonstrates an excellent application of relevant concepts and methods, is fluently written, and shows a fully developed critical analysis of ways in which meanings are shaped.

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