Examiners' Report

Summer 2016

Pearson Edexcel GCE in English Literature 6ET04 Paper 01

Edexcel and BTEC Qualifications

Edexcel and BTEC qualifications are awarded by Pearson, the UK's largest awarding body. We provide a wide range of qualifications including academic, vocational, occupational and specific programmes for employers. For further information visit our qualifications websites at www.edexcel.com or www.btec.co.uk. Alternatively, you can get in touch with us using the details on our contact us page at www.edexcel.com/contactus.

Pearson: helping people progress, everywhere

Pearson aspires to be the world's leading learning company. Our aim is to help everyone progress in their lives through education. We believe in every kind of learning, for all kinds of people, wherever they are in the world. We've been involved in education for over 150 years, and by working across 70 countries, in 100 languages, we have built an international reputation for our commitment to high standards and raising achievement through innovation in education. Find out more about how we can help you and your students at: www.pearson.com/uk

General comments

This report is based on the findings of a number of moderators who between them have read hundreds of coursework essays. For most of them this is the last time working for this unit and this specification (although there will be a repeat chance for candidates next year). The comment below is typical of many:

> Across all my centres, there was once again evidence of much purposeful, effective and enthusiastic engagement with texts and tasks as candidates grappled with the demands of A2 English Literature coursework. Most centres are now adept at preparing their candidates for this Unit, whether it be through teaching two or three texts (and ensuring some independence of approach through the range of questions devised and background reading undertaken), or through guiding their students to choose a productive combination of texts and a suitable 'line of enquiry'.

Looking back over the years since this specification started in 2008, centres have managed to find the approach that has suited them best. One of the bigger questions that centres have to decide is how much freedom to offer students in their choice of text. Here is another moderator's comment:

> For larger centres, with a broad ability-range, the 'safest' option, which still allows *some* freedom of choice for candidates, is perhaps to teach one or two texts and encourage candidates to select one or two rewarding texts for themselves, since offering candidates a completely free choice of texts does require careful supervision at every stage of the process if candidates are to maximise their performance.

This comment was made about a different approach:

> I found three centres deserving of particular mention where candidates had been allowed a completely free choice of texts but had been carefully guided in finding a productive combination (taking their own interests into account), framing appropriately focused questions, (generally a critic's assertion accompanied by an evaluative element: "To what extent do you agree….?" with, in some cases, a qualifying adverb: "Discuss the truth of the assertion that novels by writers dealing with totalitarianism are *ultimately* pessimistic") and adopting a suitable "angle".

Choices and tasks which worked well…

It was again pleasing to see some adventurous combinations of texts incorporating recent, less well-known publications (such as Jonathan Safran Foers, *Extraordinarily Loud and Incredibly Close*, 2005, Amity Gaige *Schroder*, 2013, and Lisa McInerney *The Glorious Heresies*, 2015), and productive, original 'pairings' (such as a focus on changing interpretations of heroism in *Beowulf*, *The Lord of the Rings* and *Casino Royale*).

… and not so well

In most Centres, the preferred 'configuration' comprised two literary texts which worked well together, plus background reading, though there was some

difference of opinion over what constituted a text! One candidate's promised discussion of Romantic Poetry alongside the centre's core text turned out to be two short poems ("I Am" and "She walks in beauty…") while another centre had listed *Dubliners* as a core text but every candidate referred to just "The Sisters" and "Clay", two of the shortest (and not necessarily richest!) stories in the collection.

Some candidates were hampered by combining two or three literary texts which were unlikely to work well together such as *Othello* and *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (for a consideration of the role of villains in exploring notions of good and evil) or *Othello* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (when discussing the idea that "to reveal art and conceal the artist is art's aim").

Tackling the assessment objectives

Candidates' success in structuring a convincing argument (AO1) is significantly affected by the phrasing of the question they are addressing. Vague tasks with often a socio-political or psychological, rather than literary, focus ("Are women oppressed in twentieth-century literature? [with reference to *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *The Glass Menagerie*]" or "Consider the presentation of identity in "I Am", *The War of the Worlds* and *Never Let Me Go*") invariably inhibited candidates from establishing and developing a cogent and cohesive argument within the 3,000-word limit. Similarly, where candidates appeared to have been given free rein with their questions ("What do the authors of *Othello* and *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* bring to the 'evil' aspect of characters when faced with the duality of man?"), it was hard to see how such a tortuous task could elicit a suitably focused response.

Choosing an apt critic's comment, on the other hand, (to focus on AO3, strand 2) with an evaluative element, (such as "'Powerful as Miller's plays all are, in varying degrees, none of them successfully passed beyond pathos into tragedy". To what extent do you agree with Trowbridge's assertion in relation to *Death of a Salesman*, *A View from the Bridge* and the film of *The Crucible?*') immediately provided a 'hook' on which candidates could begin to hang an argument.

As in previous years, AOs2 and 4 often proved the least effectively addressed and assessed with AO2 being rewarded every time a candidate quoted the text and candidates tending to overlook the response of modern audiences to their texts even if they showed appropriate contextual awareness of the prevailing *Zeitgeist* when texts were first produced/ published. Whilst some candidates displayed strong skills of close textual analysis in looking at writers' choice of *language*, it was comparatively rare to find them engaging with equal confidence in an examination of writers' choice of *structure and form*.

Some centres added a corollary to questions reminding candidates to explore contexts (then and now) for AO4 and to consider other interpretations of their texts (AO3 strand 2). Incorporating some reference to how literary texts have been interpreted over time (e.g. different performances of plays on stage or in film) was another way of successfully addressing both AO3 strand 2 and AO4 while introducing the formula "By what means do writers present…?" in the task was intended to emphasise the importance of exploring writers' craft for AO2.

It was pleasing to see candidates making effective use of biographical and literary contexts in addressing AO4 with Kesey's own experience as an attendant in a psychiatric unit or Orwell's pronouncements in such essays as "Politics and The English Language" enriching candidates' understanding of the personal and thematic preoccupations of these writers in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*

and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Equally an appreciation of the evolution of literary genres (the Gothic novel or traditional fairy-tales and myths) added a fresh perspective to candidates' study of such modern variants as Carter's *The Bloody Chamber* or Duffy's *The World's Wife*.

Unusual features

A few centres had encouraged candidates to offer a combination of genres (novel, play and poetry) drawn from different centuries in order to direct candidates to address firmly AOs 2 and 4 with Gay's "Trivia", Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year* and Nicholson's *Bleeding London* proving a particularly fruitful combination for an examination of how the capital has been perceived over time by different writers. While *The Great Gatsby, Death of a Salesman* and a Williams play after often cited when considering the demise of The American Dream, it was pleasing to see some more unusual but equally fruitful combinations: *Snow Falling on Cedars, The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *Chimerica* for example.

Some Interesting Combinations of Texts and Investigatory Approaches

- Challenging accepted notions of morality in *The Picture of Dorian Gray, Lolita* and *A Clockwork Orange* or an exploration of moral corruption in *The Picture of Dorian Gray, A Fairly Honourable Defeat* and *The Secret History*

- The relationship between women and the society in which they live: *Madame Bovary, A Room with a View, Notes on a Scandal* or *A Doll's House, A Streetcar named Desire* and *The Edible Woman*

- Colonial attitudes; erosion of culture: *The Tempest, Translations* and *Our Country's Good*

- Uneasy relationship between England and Ireland: *Translations, Making History* and screenplay of *The Wind that Shakes the Barley*

- One centre encouraged every candidate to look more closely at the function of the novel as a literary construction e.g. the novel as a vehicle for exploring society (*Emma, Beloved, Atonement*) or the novel as a vehicle for exploring the complexities of characters' inner world (*Wuthering Heights, Beloved, The House of the Spirits*)

- A candidate with a keen interest in the rise of socialism considered the role of the novel as an early 20th-century social document by focusing on *The Ragged-Trousered Philanthropists* and *Love on the Dole*, supported by *The Oxford History of England 1870-1914,* to produce a thoroughly personal, perceptive and well-informed essay, just the kind of response this Unit has always sought to foster!

If things went wrong...

The most common specification infringement was again the absence of a Bibliography (or in some cases uncertainty over how to cite sources with foot-notes /end-notes used sporadically in place of a formal Bibliography). Whilst

lower-scoring candidates tended to rely on website articles, there were some truly impressive extensive Bibliographies too where candidates had not only read widely but, having absorbed others' opinions on their texts, were able to challenge with confidence "other readers"' interpretations in their own line of argument.

There was some discrepancy between the word counts at the end of essays and the overall total given on the front-cover sheet.

There were some cases where there was no mark of any kind on several pages of candidates' work and the outcome was either grossly inflated marks for the AOs or significant under-valuing of candidates' achievement.

Adjustments to a Centre's marks were also needed where the lowest-scoring candidate in a very able centre had been unjustly penalised or the highest-scoring candidate in a centre of modest-ability candidates had been over-rewarded. Centres should be aware that this can sometimes trigger adjustment of the overall marks for a centre.

Thorough internal standardisation of the assessment of candidates' folders, particularly where more than one teacher had been involved in the marking of their work, was crucial in ensuring consistency of assessment across the cohort.

Examples of students' work:

Sample A

Here is the opening of a students' essay which was awarded full marks. Note the clarity of the task, with a focus on what writers (as opposed to just characters) are doing and the way the candidate manages to include all three texts for comparison in the opening paragraph. This is a confident and impressive opening, particularly in the use of the final line of Pinter's play as a starting point for the analysis of the text as a whole (we can see that this is not going to be a scene-by-scene, starting at the beginning, type of approach).

A Consideration of the ways in which three authors develop and use the idea of the outsider, using Tennessee Williams' 'A Streetcar Named Desire', Pinter's 'The Homecoming' and Henry James' 'The Turn of the Screw.'

'Don't become a stranger,' writes Pinter. Ruth's perplexing final line in 'The Homecoming,' demonstrates the enigmatic nature of her character and how Pinter sets out to shock and push boundaries by contrasting outsiders and insiders to emphasise the absurd nature of the family. Pinter's use of outsiders differs from Williams' and James'. Pinter takes the bold step of making the audience the main outsider, by using existentialist ideas, whereas James draws the reader in through his use of the first person perspective. James develops a clear outsider in the governess: her imagining of Peter Quint and Miss Jessel is a way of trying to understand new surroundings and events that occurred before her arrival. Williams' development of Blanche as an outsider emphasises her mental instability.

Sample B

There are some good points here. Again the task is clear, though not as focused or challenging as the first example, but at least there is emphasis on what the writers are doing in "role" and "presentation". The word "evaluation" is good too. We have the sense however that this candidate is almost too eager to get it all said at once. We start with an assertion that will need some backing up and we are not quite sure what is meant by the "subliminal" impression. We are offered a very interesting idea - the erosions into male dominance - but are not quite convinced that the stage direction "mildly" in itself tells us that Stella is "a firm focused character."

An evaluation of the role and presentation of women in Tennessee Williams' 'A Streetcar Named Desire' Pinter's 'The Homecoming' and Henry James' 'The Turn of the Screw'

Williams, Pinter and James all create a sense that women are often overpowered by men, supported by the character Stanley in A Streetcar Named Desire and his chauvinistic behaviour: "Now just remember what Huey Long said – that every man's a king – and I'm the king around here, and don't you forget it."

Nevertheless there is the subliminal impression that all the writers portray women who strive to gain dominance in relationships portrayed by Stella, Blanche and Ruth who gradually make erosions into male dominance. In scene one, Williams makes Stella's controlling manner over her husband Stanly immediately noticeable. "Stella: [mildly] Don't holler at me like thyat. Thgrough Williams'stage directions we quickly iunderstand that Stella is a firm focused character.

Sample C

This is the conclusion of an essay working on the same title as Sample A. The candidate has brought together a number of ideas here: the governess in "The Turn of the Screw" failing to recognise her chief problem, that she is an outsider; Stanley and Blanche both being outsiders; and Pinter's placing of the audience on the outside. This is very sophisticated writing and illustrates the value of a conclusion that does not simply repeat what has gone before but pulls the whole essay together.

Therefore in using the Governess as a newcomer, James created ambiguity and reader interest, whilst the Governess' first hand account emphasised her refusal to recognise her role as an outsider; enabling James to disguise the true nature of the ghosts. Williams also used Blanche as a newcomer to introduce the play and provide an immediate contrast to the other characters. By paradoxically uniting the protagonists of Stanley and Blanche as outsiders, Williams presented self-destruction through isolation. In contrast Pinter placed emphasis on the variations of isolation within the family, and auto-elective outsiders. He limits the characters to the immediate family, and setting to the house. Whilst Williams uses the audience as insiders to further isolate his characters, Pinter puts the audience on the outside, and those who can open their minds and put themselves on the inside take the most away.

Practical points commonly arising on reports to centres:

Although this is for most people the last time with this particular unit, coursework does continue in the new specification and there are points here which have a general application.

- Do make sure that the moderator receives work by the published date (May 15th). This is the actual deadline – receiving it early is always appreciated.
- Unless it is your school's policy, there is no need for the parcel to be sent "signed for" (although it is important to obtain a certificate of posting for your own records): having to collect a parcel from the post office, because the moderator (who is probably a teacher too) was not at home, only delays matters.
- Remember to include the folders with the highest and lowest marks, even if they are not asterisked. (A tip: where either of these two folders represents an extreme – a sudden really good piece of work in a more modest collection, or one that is markedly below the standard of the rest – take care not to over-react. A folder is not worth full marks just because it is the best one in the pack, nor is the weakest candidate necessarily worthy of a mark down in the teens and twenties. Getting these, and the rank order right, help to present a stable collection of marks that will make sense to the moderator.
- Be as helpful as possible to the moderator by commenting evaluatively on the students' work. It is quite tempting only to pick up on the positives in an attempt to "sell" the given mark to a moderator, but an acknowledgment of weakness also helps the moderator to confirm the centre's judgement.
- OPTEMS: the centre should keep the green one. Enclose the yellow one with the work that goes to the moderator. The top copy goes to Hellaby, Rotherham. It is important to retain the green one at the centre in case anything is lost in the post, and sending the top copy to the moderator delays the process of inputting marks into the database.
- Ensure that everything is signed and that candidates have included a cumulative word count at the foot of each page. Please don't let them exceed the maximum word count, as this is part of the exercise: the task is to create a folder within 3,000 words and reward is given within AO1 for doing this.
- Numbering pages is really helpful, as is having work in a readable size of print (less than 12 point can be troublesome).

For centres not entering repeat candidates next year, but moving on to new syllabuses, and speaking behalf of all the 6ET04 moderators, it has been a pleasure reading your folders. As the moderator was quoted as saying at the beginning of this report they showed "purposeful, effective and enthusiastic engagement with texts and tasks." Teachers should be congratulated on the part they played in achieving this.

Grade Boundaries

Grade boundaries for this, and all other papers, can be found on the website on this link:
http://www.edexcel.com/iwantto/Pages/grade-boundaries.aspx