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Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2022

Pearson Edexcel Level 3 Advanced Subsidiary

In English Literature (8ET0)

Paper 2: Prose

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## **Introduction**

The 8ET0\_02 component requires candidates to study two prose texts from their chosen topic in depth, with at least one text written pre 19<sup>th</sup> century. The most popular topics on the paper continue to be Science and Society and Women in Society. This series there were far fewer responses to other topics, particularly Childhood, Colonisation and its Aftermath and Crime and Detection, so this report will have less to say about these questions on the paper.

Given the unprecedented demands during the past two years, centres and candidates should be commended for being as prepared as possible for the examination. Overall, examiners enjoyed reading candidates' responses, the majority of which were relevant and demonstrated some attention to the assessment objectives. A number of essays were unfinished and opportunities for more timed practice should be considered during the during the delivery of the specification.

As hoped, candidates approached the questions from a wide range of angles, a reminder that the mark schemes are indeed just indicative – relevant readings of the texts, rooted in the question with well-chosen textual evidence, will be rewarded as appropriate.

## **Addressing the Assessment Objectives**

### **A01**

Answering the specific question is an important factor when determining the quality of a script. While practising past paper questions is an effective way to revise and prepare for the examination, candidates must be willing to adapt their knowledge to the specific question on the paper. Several candidates took the opportunity to adapt a question towards a topic which they had been hoping to address. Secure knowledge of the texts studied will enable candidates to respond with confidence to whatever question is posed.

In 2019, an additional 15 minutes was added to the time allocation for this paper and candidates are encouraged to use this time to support their essay planning. Examiners noted that an absence of effective planning was common, and consequently answers were repetitive and lacked focus.

Effective planning enabled candidates to communicate their thinking and knowledge in an appropriate critical style. They began their essay with a strong opening thesis statement that defined what they understood the key idea in the question to be and allowed for a structured, comparative argument with points illustrated by short, embedded quotation and efficacious contextual links.

Mid-level answers covered all the assessment objectives but the focus on each tended to be uneven. The structure of the response was usually effective, although the argument was not always consistent. Essays would have benefitted from incorporating evidence from across the novels.

Scripts attaining Level 2 or below were characterised by a lack of content and organisation of ideas, with repetition of the key terms of the question, either lengthy or no quotation, and a

narrative overview. There was a general listing of points of argument rather than an exploration of ideas. There was a tendency to focus on one or two assessment objectives.

## **A02**

There was consensus across the examining team that essays needed to demonstrate greater focus on effective literary analysis and candidates are advised to be less ambitious in their range of points discussed to allow for more emphasis on supporting literary analysis. Examiners observed that the best candidates analysed the impact of a range of methods employed by writers, including genre and narrative style, and often commented upon how meaning was shaped across the whole text. Less successful responses rarely moved beyond word-level analysis, commented on one or two specific episodes, and showed little or no awareness of writers' craft and limited understanding that characters are fictional constructs.

## **A03**

Examiners commented that weaker responses relied too heavily on author biography and historical facts that seemed awkwardly bolted on in a context paragraph. Biographical context (Wilde's homosexuality, and Mary Shelley's marriage) often led to general assertions rather than meaningful links. Centres are reminded that literary context can be helpful in illuminating the techniques of an author. Yet, there were notable examples of contextual understanding that considered how themes resonate with both the 'then' and the 'now'. For example, examiners read several sensitive and evaluative reflections on how events in *Never Let Me Go* could relate to the modern reader's awareness of human trafficking and present-day slavery.

## **A04**

Where candidates achieved the higher levels, interesting, pertinent and well-integrated connections between the texts were explored. Moreover, effective links between texts were wide-ranging, (themes, character motivations, narrative methods, and context), and sustained throughout the response. Many scripts were placed in Level 2 reflecting a lack of balanced treatment of the two texts studied. It is not sufficient to include 'also' or 'on the other hand' – explorations of connections need to be developed relevant to the argument. Too often candidates relied on comparing events in the two novels rather than exploring ideas in the texts.

Finally, a reminder that A05 is not rewarded for this paper. A number of responses included Marxist and feminist interpretations, often with named critics. While this can be relevant in terms of the context of how texts have been read and received, candidates did on occasions become quite focused on such readings at the expense of the other AOs.

### **Question 1**

Very limited number of responses to this question about how writers evoked sympathy for their characters.

### **Question 2**

Very limited response to this question about human failings.

### **Question 3**

Limited number of responses to this question about the presentation of conflict arising from cultural differences.

### **Question 4**

A small number of responses addressing the presentation of disappointing experiences.

Some candidates resorted to listing a series of disappointments, but others developed an argument by considering what made the experiences disappointing and how characters responded to disappointment.

### **Question 5**

Limited number of responses considering the theme of responsibility.

### **Question 6**

The presentation of troubled characters.

There was a small number of responses to this question. A few essays provided some effective discussion of troubled characters as a feature of the detective fiction genre.

### **Question 7**

The absence of compassion.

This question elicited a good range of essays. Many candidates were able to reflect on how the writers used a lack of compassion to critique society. Examiners observed that some successful responses considered how the writers used narrative viewpoint and language to normalise the lack of compassion in society. Some explored how ambition and fear of the 'other' were catalysts for the lack of compassion and considered acts of rebellion and revenge as a response to uncaring societies. Candidates comparing *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Frankenstein* often noted

the suffering of women in patriarchal societies that lacked compassion while responses to *Frankenstein* and *Never Let Me Go* frequently highlighted how humanity was impacted by scientific transgression.

### **Question 8**

Experiences of separation.

Overall, this question was answered well. Several responses referencing *Frankenstein* tended to focus on the main with the creature and the creator being 'separated' which sometimes led to unbalanced responses. Better essays considered how the authors showed the impact that separation had on relationships. Others reflected on the driving forces behind episodes of separation and linked it to authorial purpose and context. It was pleasing to note some candidates addressed methods such as the symbolism of colours and clothing in *The Handmaid's Tale* and the use of settings, e.g. Orkney and Hailsham, to explore ideas about separation.

### **Question 9**

The use of illusion and reality.

Confident candidates commented on the writers' craft to good effect with examiners remarking on detailed discussion of the role of unreliable narrators such as Dr Faraday and the dichotomy between appearance and reality as a metaphor for turbulent societies and anxieties. Lower-level responses simply described supernatural occurrences in the texts.

### **Question 10**

The impact of traumatic events.

While several responses retold narratives, there were some interesting responses that used contextual influences to good effect. Referencing *Dracula*, some candidates considered the impact of modernity and the advent of the New Woman had precipitated trauma in Victorian society. There was comparison of how trauma leads some characters to lose hope while others were motivated to overcome difficulties making them admirable characters. Additionally, both the psychological and physical effects of trauma were addressed alongside the portrayal of characters' reactions to trauma and critiques of gender stereotypes.

### **Question 11**

Theme of reputation.

Some astute and sensitive readings were in evidence. Studies of all four novels explored how reputations were reflected through setting and the writer's use of imagery to suggest it was in some way a façade. Double standards and the hypocrisy of patriarchal societies were

highlighted with social expectations of female behaviour, while some candidates considered how marriage improved or ruined reputations. Contextual understanding was further evident in discussions that centred on the need for women to refrain from being overly emotional.

### **Question 12**

The relationship between women.

This question facilitated responses across all levels. Examiners highlighted that many responses saw candidates reflecting more broadly about how relationships between women were depicted and what they represented. There was some confident discussion of how such relationships could be powerful, provide support to characters who suffer and become strained when characters change or when external pressures challenge the bonds. Several essays featuring *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Mrs Dalloway* provided meaningful comments on the significance of a writer's gender and sexual orientation and how that might influence the presentation of characters' relationships.