



Pearson
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Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

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Pearson Edexcel International Advanced Level
In English Literature (WET03)
Unit 3: Poetry and Prose

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Introduction

Centres are thanked for choosing Pearson Edexcel for their International A Level provider.

For this unit, WET03, the open book examination is 2 hours long and there are two sections.

All candidates must answer Section A, Question 1, Unseen Poetry. Candidates then respond to a question from Section B, Prose, on the two prose texts that they have studied.

For **Section A**, Unseen Poetry, candidates will use the reading and critical skills that they have learnt throughout the course. Candidates will answer one essay question on a post-1900 unseen poem that is printed on a separate Source Insert.

Context is not assessed in Section A of the paper.

For **Section B**, Prose, candidates answer one comparative essay question from a choice of two, on the two studied prose texts that they have studied. Candidates can select from the themes: ***Growing Up, Colonisation and After, Science and Society*** or ***Women and Society***. Candidate responses should be informed by an understanding and appreciation of the contexts in which their chosen texts are both written and read. Candidates should be encouraged to view the texts in comparison to each other.

In Section B, students will study two out of a choice of three thematically linked texts. They will learn about:

- the importance of the relationship between texts, making connections and comparison between texts
- the significance of the cultural and contextual influences under which literary texts are written and received
- how to respond creatively, relevantly and in an informed way to texts using appropriate terminology and concepts as well as coherent and accurate written expression
- how to analyse texts from a critical perspective.

There are 20 marks available for Section A and 30 for Section B. The total number of 50 marks available for this paper represents 25% of IA2.

Section A, Unseen Poetry, assesses Assessment Objectives A01 and A02.

Section B, Prose, assesses Assessment Objectives A01, A02, A03 and A04. A05 is *not* assessed in this paper.

Please refer to the specification for details of the Assessment Objectives and their full weightings.

General Overview of the WET03 January 2021 (2101) paper and performance

Although there was a small entry, this has been a successful paper. There were no errors, no erratum notices and no changes made to the mark scheme.

All candidates must answer Section A, Question 1, Unseen Poetry. Candidates then respond to a question from Section B, Prose. For this series, a full range of marks was awarded.

The unseen poem for Question 1 was ***The First Strokes*** by Carol Rumens. This was a discriminating poem allowing for varying interpretation. As in previous series, responses covered the full range of marks with most placed within Levels 2-4. Candidates who demonstrated a holistic understanding of the poem anchored in the poet's use of voice, form and language were more successful than candidates who either provided a descriptive and superficial overview or began with a close analysis of individual poetic techniques.

As in previous series, some candidates tended to delve into a detailed exploration of imagery, metaphor and other individual techniques before they looked for the overarching or basic meaning of the poem. This meant that obvious interpretations were sometimes missed.

In the Prose section, the most popular theme was, once again, ***Science and Society*** (Questions 6 and 7) with the second most popular theme ***Women and Society*** (Questions 8 and 9). There were few responses to ***Growing Up*** (Questions 2 and 3) and no responses to ***Colonisation and After*** (Questions 4 and 5). Many responses gained marks in the top two levels.

Not all candidates considered all of the assessment objectives in detail, with some uneven coverage that hindered progression through the mark scheme. Some candidates, for instance, did not consider context sufficiently enough and others did not explore aspects of the writer's craft, such as language, form and structure. For this section, many candidates were obviously well prepared in terms of knowing the content of the prose texts well and could draw on a range of evidence to support their points.

For the most part comparisons between the two studied texts were made with many candidates making sophisticated points. In responses that were more successful, these comparisons were specific and pertinent, moving away from the more generalised and simplistic links made by responses in the lower levels. There were few responses that treated the texts as separate entities and the quality of responses, as in previous series, continues to improve.

On the whole, written expression was clear and candidates are meeting the requirement to write fluently, accurately and effectively their knowledge, understanding and critical understanding of texts. There were few essays where the meaning was not clear or was hindered.

Marks are applied positively, but in order to meet the demands of the highest levels on the mark scheme candidates should consider and explore how values and attitudes are expressed in texts and use literary critical concepts and terminology with discrimination.

Section A: Post-1900 Unseen Poetry

Question 1

The unseen poem for Question 1 was *The First Strokes* by Carol Rumens. This was a successful poem as it proved to be a good discriminator with a full range of marks awarded. Many candidates explored the poem in depth, looking for possible interpretations in meaning, subtleties and nuance and thus were placed in Level 3 or above. There were few responses placed in Level 1.

The most successful responses were those that were able to cover all of the assessment objectives fully and that answered the question. These responses ranged across the poem, demonstrating a controlled application and critically evaluative approach in selecting evidence to support their arguments.

A range of interpretations were offered, such as the presentation of the relationship between the poet and her father, his stroke and subsequent loss of language as a result and the learning of the English language and its comparison to swimming. Many candidates explored the extended metaphor of swimming and its link to the poet's father and her memories of him. Many good points were made about how this was illuminating for the poet, and that the poem contained advice about appreciating life and family relationships.

The poem is written in the form of a letter to a friend who is 'learning English', and therefore, could be interpreted as an act of support in the same way that the poet received from her father in learning to swim ('a little self-trust as you kick off'). Only a few candidates fully explored this link, noting the pun of 'strokes' in the title and its reference to both the acts of writing and swimming.

The majority of candidates considered structure and identified the use of free verse, making pertinent comments about the use of enjambment and caesura to indicate a conversational tone or stream of consciousness in the poem. Some candidates explored the effect of the physical shape of the poem on the page, which detracted from possible, better comment that could have been made about tone, voice and structure.

Some candidates were more successful than others at handling poetic and language techniques. Most identified the use of metaphor, simile and adjectives (such as in medicinal light) and were able to provide supported comment. Better responses explored the creation of tone and voice within the poem, analysing and evaluating the use of juxtaposition and antithetical language.

There were few misreadings of the poem, although some candidates struggled to identify the central relationship, that of the poet's relationship with her father, and instead misidentified the perspective of the poem as being written from the point of view of that of a child speaking to her grandfather. Some candidates also produced fragmented approaches to understanding the poem, beginning with close analysis of isolated poetic techniques rather than viewing the poem as a whole and considering what the overall impact of the ideas might be before exploring some of them in more depth.

Some candidates wrote responses that were more brief, but had obviously spent time carefully examining the poem before beginning to write. Candidates should be encouraged to spend time at the beginning of the examination reading and annotating the poem before planning what they want to say.

For this section of the paper, candidates are required to show knowledge and understanding of the function of genre features, conventions in poetry, and demonstrate a knowledge and understanding of a range of ways to read texts, including reading for detail of how writers use and adapt language, form and structure in texts and by responding critically and creatively.

It is recommended that centres continue to make use of the **Sample Assessment Materials** and past papers in order to become even more familiar with the assessment requirements. The mark grids demonstrate how candidates can progress from one level to the next. In order to achieve Level 4 or above, responses need to be discriminating, critical and evaluative. Analysis of the poem should be controlled and well supported with evidence and close reference to the techniques used and should provide examples of the nuances and subtleties of the writer's craft.

The Unseen Poetry question assesses Assessment Objectives (A0) 1 and 2:

A01: Articulate informed, personal and creative responses to literary texts, using associated concepts and terminology, and coherent, accurate written expression.

A02: Analyse ways in which meanings are shaped in literary texts.

Context is not assessed in Section A of the paper.

Section B: Prose

A full range of marks was awarded with many candidates gaining marks in Level 3 and above. Centres should be congratulated on having prepared their candidates so thoroughly on their chosen texts given the difficulties and challenges faced at this time. As in previous series, responses were varied. Some candidates wrote insightful, sophisticated and well supported essays that were tightly focussed on the question set. Other responses demonstrated a superficial understanding of the material studied with brief comparisons or provided a narrative and descriptive approach. Few responses treated the texts as separate entities.

Most candidates were able to make general points and to use evidence to support their argument. Elements of the writer's craft, such as narrative voice and structure (the framed narrative of *Frankenstein* or *The Handmaid's Tale*, for instance) were mentioned with more successful responses including discussion of perspective, symbolism and other linguistic and literary techniques.

In order to meet the demands of Assessment Objective 3 (A03), relevant contextual comment needs to be provided to support points made. This can include social and historical information, the critical and literary reception and interpretation of texts as well as information concerning the writer's life. Candidates handled this requirement with varying degrees of success. In the best responses, candidates were able to

integrate and embed pertinent contextual comment that drew on their wider critical knowledge of the novels studied and illuminated the comparison and argument made. The most successful candidates were discriminating in the contextual detail they selected and were able to use it to make apt comparison between the two novels (for instance, the conventions of the Gothic genre used in *Wuthering Heights* and its comparison with *Beloved*). Less successful responses were limited by a 'bolted on' approach to the inclusion of contextual comment, listing social and historical information that was not relevant in an attempt to meet the demands of the Assessment Objective. Candidates should be encouraged to be more discerning in their approach to context. Contextual comment is necessary in order to fully meet the demands of the Assessment Objectives, but candidates should be discriminating in their use of it, selecting examples that fully support their points rather than listing historical events and facts. It is better to use fewer, relevant and well explored examples that clarify the argument made.

Due to the small number of entries, and responses for each question, comments are based on the limited evidence seen and can only be included for the most popular questions.

Questions 2 and 3

Growing Up

The set texts for the theme of **Growing Up** are: *What Maisie Knew*, *Great Expectations* and *The Color Purple*.

There were few responses for the **Growing Up** option. All the candidates considered *Great Expectations* and *The Color Purple*. There were no responses on *What Maisie Knew*. Question 3 had the higher number of responses and is considered in more detail.

Question 3: Compare the ways in which the writers of your two chosen texts present the use of power.

Candidates clearly understood the content of the set texts, but in some responses, ideas were brief or were under developed. Candidates explored the physical, social and psychological uses of power and their effects upon the characters. Points made included: the physical abuse and violence suffered by both Pip and Celie at the hands of their respective 'parents' – Mrs Joe and the use of the 'tickler' and Alphonso; the terror that Pip feels during his first meeting with Magwitch and the power that the convict has over the boy and Mr. - encouraging Harpo to beat Sofia.

Responses also explored the nature of social and psychological power within the novels. Candidates explored the financial wealth and social status of Havisham, Estella and Drummle as a form of power and compared this to the use of segregation and discrimination in *The Color Purple*.

There were few comments on how individuals within the novels might seek to gain power for themselves and there was little development or exploration of aspects of the writer's craft with responses lacking the expected level of knowledge of terminology.

Questions 6 and 7

Science and Society

The set texts for the theme of **Science and Society** are: ***Never Let Me Go***, ***The Handmaid's Tale*** and ***Frankenstein***. This was the most popular theme on the paper, with most candidates considering ***The Handmaid's Tale*** and comparing it with one of the other set texts. Responses were divided evenly between the two questions set for this theme.

Question 6: Consider the ways in which the writers of your two chosen texts use fiction to present a message to their society.

Most candidates responded to ***The Handmaid's Tale***, with an even distribution between ***Never Let Me Go*** and ***Frankenstein*** as the comparative text. This was a question open to a range of interpretations and many ideas were included, such as the manipulation of science: enforced reproduction in Gilead and the aftermath of nuclear disasters, the questions regarding the morality of cloning presented in ***Never Let Me Go*** and the lives of the Hailsham students and Victor Frankenstein's determination to 'create' life at any cost.

Candidates also explored aspects of totalitarianism and how the writers might present novels that warn their readers of the dangers of state control. The importance of the 'wall' in ***The Handmaid's Tale*** as a visual symbol of oppression and deterrance and Atwood's presentation of the loss of women's rights were ideas that were well contrasted with the lack of autonomy presented within both ***Frankenstein*** and ***Never Let Me Go***.

Responses included a range of well made and relevant contextual comment for this question. One candidate, in particular, made some very sophisticated points comparing the presentation of birth and death to the Gothic concept of liminality.

Question 7: Consider the ways in which the writers of your two chosen texts portray ways in which characters gain awareness and increase their understanding.

Candidates responded confidently to this question and a full range of marks was awarded. The question asked candidates to explore how characters increase and gain awareness and understanding and there were a range of interpretations provided in response. As with Question 6, most candidates had studied ***The Handmaid's Tale*** and compared this with one of the other set texts.

There were some pertinent comments made about the function of the Red Center and the Aunts within Gilead in the re-education of the Handmaids as well as Offred having to hide her understanding and awareness of her situation from those around her. Candidates commenting on ***Frankenstein*** noted the rapid pace of the Creature's development and his awakening sense of self-awareness, of how he learns from interaction with others (both good and bad). There were some excellent points made about the gradual increase of understanding in the students of Hailsham, of the pressures in the friendship between Kathy, Ruth and Tommy and of the contrast

between their levels of understanding of their situation and function in society as adults as compared with their understanding as teenagers.

Many candidates made good points about the use of narrative form and structure for this question, in particular exploring how the use of letters and the epistolary form are used to great effect in *Never Let Me Go* and *The Handmaid's Tale*.

Questions 8 and 9 **Women and Society**

The set texts for the theme of **Women and Society** are: *Wuthering Heights*, *Mrs Dalloway* and *Beloved*. This was the second most popular theme on the paper.

The most popular texts were *Wuthering Heights* and *Beloved*. There were few responses on *Mrs Dalloway* and comment is limited to the most popular novels.

Question 8: Consider the ways in which the writers of your two chosen texts present strong men.

A range of responses were provided for this question. At times focus on the question was not maintained and candidates made arguments that did not fit the demands of the question or provided a narrative description of the novels. Points made included: the presentation of wealth and social status in *Wuthering Heights* and the strength they afford to the male characters; Heathcliff's relative lack of status against his perceived strength of character; Paul D's mental strength and courage in surviving the trauma of Sweet Home as well as the brute force and cruelty applied by Schoolteacher and his nephews.

One candidate, in particular, wrote a very successful high Level 4 response comparing the strength of the male characters in *Wuthering Heights* and *Beloved* as a product of the presentation of the strength of the female characters. This was an enjoyable and sophisticated response to read, demonstrating that all interpretations, if well explored and supported with relevant evidence, are valid.

Question 9: Consider the ways in which the writers of your two chosen texts use names of characters or places that have significant or symbolic meanings.

Responses to this question took into consideration an exploration of place names and settings, for instance: the juxtaposition of the name *Wuthering Heights*, with its Gothic associations of windswept and eerie settings, with *Thrushcross Grange*; the irony of the name 'Sweet Home Plantation' in *Beloved*, and the gap between the pleasant connotations associated with it and the use of slavery, and later barbaric cruelty, that takes place within it.

The symbolism of the names of characters was also taken into account. Many responses contained comment on the symbolism of *Denver*, *Beloved* and *Stamp Paid* as signifying important milestones in the lives of the characters as well as *Baby Suggs's* name signalling her status as a slave. Some responses noted the deliberately repetitious quality of the male slaves on *Sweet Home* all being called 'Paul'. One very

successful response noted the cycle of names in *Wuthering Heights* and how it symbolises the intergenerational trauma enacted within the novel.

Paper Summary

Performance of this paper has been very pleasing and there have been many marks awarded in the top two levels. Centres should be congratulated on preparing their candidates so well.

Based on performance on this paper, centres are offered the following advice for their future success:

- address the assessment objectives and use mark schemes and past papers to guide teaching
- encourage candidates to use a range of literary terminology to identify and explore how writers create meaning; discuss the effects that these techniques have on the reader
- for Section A, encourage candidates to discuss a broad understanding of the poem and its overarching ideas before moving into a close analysis of poetic technique. Candidates should spend some time carefully reading, annotating and planning before they start to write their response
- for Section B, candidates should be reminded to compare both novels and to address aspects of the writer's craft such as narrative voice, structure and literary and linguistic devices. Narrative approaches are rarely successful in meeting the demands of the assessment objectives and candidates should be steered away from providing an overview of plot and content in the novels they have studied
- in order to meet the demands of Assessment Objective 3 (A03), students must consider the contextual factors surrounding the production and reception of the novels. Context can take a wide variety of forms including social, historical, cultural and critical factors. Contextual comment should be relevant to the specific arguments and comparisons being made and should be integrated well into the response
- read the wording of the question carefully and spend some time planning the response
- enjoy sharing your knowledge and enthusiasm for the novels studied with the examiner

