

Examiners' Report/  
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2016

Pearson Edexcel International GCSE  
in English Language A (4EA0)  
Paper 01

Edexcel Certificate  
in English Language A (KEA0)  
Paper 01

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## **Introduction**

The paper is organised into three sections. Section A tests only reading and is based upon an unseen passage. The passage studied in Section A in June 2016 was adapted from *My Father's Places* by Aeronwy Thomas. Section B tests both reading and writing by asking candidates to respond to one of the non-fiction passages from the Anthology, in this case, Climate Change Webpage - Greenpeace UK. Section C is a single writing task that is not connected to either of the reading activities already undertaken on the paper. The paper was well received with most candidates finding it very accessible.

## **Section A: Reading**

### **Questions 1-4**

The passage chosen proved to be accessible to almost all candidates, with very few experiencing any difficulties in reading comprehension. The subject matter of June 2016 was the childhood memories of the daughter of Dylan Thomas. The introduction explained that her father was a famous poet but the questions did not focus upon this at all and candidates who were not aware of Dylan Thomas were in no way disadvantaged. Question 1 was a single mark question that tested the skills of selection and retrieval, asking candidates to identify why the family had to carry their suitcases to the Boat House. There was only one possible answer using the wording of the passage and the vast majority of candidates were successful on this question. Question 2 was also a selection and retrieve question asking candidates to give three words or phrases that express the writer's positive feelings on arriving at the Boat House. There were three marks available for this question and the mark scheme contained nine possible answers. Most candidates gained full marks but those who did not, did so because they did not choose three distinct words or phrases or selected words and phrases from outside the given line range such as, "Time seemed to stop". This is a simple thing for centres to focus upon and would have prevented some candidates failing to gain some marks on this question. Question 3 asked candidates to explain, in their own words, what we learn about the writer's mother. This question looks to reward the quality of explanation rather than simply identifying relevant text, and therefore the instruction to candidates to use their own words is important. The mark scheme identified nine distinct aspects of the writer's mother that could feature in an answer up to a maximum of four marks. Many candidates achieved full, or nearly full, marks and were able to offer interesting interpretations of the mother as a disciplinarian or emotionally distant and to explain the reasons for their answer. Where candidates did not score full marks this was often due to candidates ignoring the focus of the question and writing about the little girl rather than the mother; other candidates simply presented quotations from the passage without any real explanation.

Question 4 was the higher mark tariff question with its greater focus on the writer's technique. This asked candidates about how the writer tried to create interest in her childhood experiences. As is usual, candidates were provided with bullet points for additional support and to help them structure their answers. In the published mark scheme examiners are told that they, "must reward all valid points that show an engagement with the text and an appreciation of the writer's technique rather than have a set agenda of items that they are looking for." To support this, at the standardising meeting all markers were made aware of a range of possible interpretations and were told that they should credit any interpretations that were clearly founded in the text. Weaker responses were often limited to a small number of points often focusing on the mother and how she treats the young girl. Many candidates wrote about the mother's walking style and about the difference in how she treats her daughter and her husband. Better answers recognised the more subtle aspects of the writer's relationship with her father. Most saw his rejection of her and interpreted that she was lonely or unfairly treated whilst others also saw her concern for her father, enquiring about his lunch, and her unrestrained joy at any form of attention from him. Some candidates were able to link interpretations of heaven through the symbolism of white, the reference to heaven and to paradise and the exultant tone that the writer uses. Better answers also recognised that this is an adult recollecting her childhood experiences and that this can be seen in her child-like language of extremes and in her simple reaction to the town and her simple wordplay on Mr Crossmouse. Better answers recognised the structure of the text, beginning at pace in media res with the family being collected at the station and swept off to their idyllic new home; the idyll is then threatened by the emotional detachment of the mother and father's "distrust" and finishing with the writer's exultation as she sweeps away with her friends, happy with her life. In many ways this is a familiar structure of happiness and contentment established, then threatened and ultimately restored.

One feature that many candidates recognised and commented upon was the use of contrasts. There is the Boat House and the countryside where the writer feels free and where the ducks and geese "wandered free"; the writer and her mother also wander freely, symbolically climbing over walls and barbed wire fences, fully inhabiting this landscape of ferns and foxgloves and rogue tulips. In contrast, as they approach the town Mably is put on a lead, the high walls of the castle are sighted and the town is presented as a place for boring people or sinister people like Mr Crossmouse. Most significantly, the town is a place where the writer, "sometimes felt it was a danger to think." This is stark contrast to the Boat House and the estuary which is a profound influence upon the poetic imagination of Dylan Thomas and which liberates the writer's own thoughts and feelings, imagining water serpents creating the ridges in the sands of the estuary. This is a rich vein of contrast that many explored with some success. Most candidates recognised the contrasting parents: mother is fast and the child is a little distant from her; father walks slowly but the writer cares for him deeply and desperately seeks his attention. Candidates need to see how patterning like this is not accidental but is a deliberate technique used by the writer to create meaning, to add detail and to create interest for the reader. Less able candidates often failed to recognise many of these features, some

failing to take note of the capital letter and to discern that "Cat" is the nickname of the mother and is not, in fact, feline at all. In summary, the most able recognise a range of features and used the text with discrimination to craft an explanation that focused upon how the writer creates interest in her childhood experiences, using textual references, which are apt and carefully chosen. Essentially the most successful candidates demonstrate higher skills of analysis and interpretation in evaluating the writer's techniques and do so by directly and doggedly focusing on the question. Centres should continue to make clear to candidates that this part of the paper is a test of reading and that a close reading of the passage will yield all of the material that candidates need to answer the questions.

## **Section B: Reading and Writing**

### **Question 5**

Section B was based upon the pre-prepared text from the Edexcel Anthology for International GCSE English Language and Literature, *Greenpeace UK*, and focused upon how the writer tries to interest the reader in the views expressed on the Greenpeace webpage. As a prepared text almost all candidates seemed to have knowledge of this text. Weaker responses were often limited range and in their ability to focus upon the writer and the thrust of the question. Stronger responses were those that were able to recognise features such as layout, image, colour and text style which are used by the writer to interest the reader and to enhance the meaning of what is actually written. Many candidates recognised features such as the use of statistics, rhetorical questions and repetition. Many saw that the writer was using colour but not all candidates were successfully able to explain the symbolism of the different colours in relation to the writer's message. Stronger answers were able to evidence their points from the text and to explain in detail how these were used to create interest for the reader.

### **Question 6**

The writing task in Section B was closely related to the reading text in section B and asked candidates to write a letter to their government to explain what you think could be done to improve the environment in their own country. The question was accessible to almost all candidates and produced a wide range of responses. Many used the passage as a direct stimulus and wrote about issues of transport and the need to reduce emissions from vehicles on the roads. Others wrote about particular issues that are local to them, such as litter. The weakest responses were often incomplete, lacking in paragraphing or structure and communicating at a basic level, often focusing solely upon a very limited range of ideas. Better responses wrote with a skilful command of the language showing a strong ability to engage the reader in an understanding of the issues that were

local to them and to offer suggestions that could help to improve the situation.

## **Section C: Writing**

### **Question 7**

Candidates were given a deliberately sweeping and contentious statement: 'Not all schools prepare young people for living in the real world,' and were then asked to explain their views on this statement. This proved to be accessible to most candidates. Once again, it is noted that the writing responses and particularly the final, 20 mark question, are sometimes not answered at all by some candidates. It is vital that students time their responses carefully and take note of the mark tariff, giving section C one third of the time available to them. This question produced a variety of responses though what was surprising was the huge number of pupils who felt that schools should be preparing them to understand mortgages, taxes and other aspects of practical financial management. Weaker responses were often very brief and were limited in their ability to clearly express their ideas, often listing school subjects that they felt were important with no real development at all. Weaker responses often struggled to move beyond the first bullet point and tended to agree with, rather than take issue with, the statement in the question. These answers were often lacking in paragraphing and a sense of structure, which kept them in the Level 1 and Level 2 mark bands. There was a band of mid-level responses that often had features of both level 2 and level 3, with some selection of vocabulary and control that was reasonably good, though sometimes repetitive and lacking in range and making use of slang in what was otherwise a formal piece of writing. The best writing showed subtlety and maturity and a control of a wide range of techniques to produce writing that connected strongly with its reader. They were often able to express nuance and even handle contradiction that perfectly demonstrated their thoughts on the statement and, by doing so, were directly responding to the question. On a language front such answers showed a sophistication in control of tense, sentence structure and a genuine understanding of how to create meaning and a real ability to control text structure.

### **Conclusion**

Each section above contains specific advice about what characterises weaker and stronger candidates. Centres are strongly encouraged to practise responding to unseen passages in timed conditions. This will support students in focusing their answers on what the question has asked for and in using their understanding of literary effects as a means of addressing the question rather than being seen as an end in their own right. The same principle applies with regard to studying the Anthology texts. The best practice in writing involves time management so as to respond appropriately to the mark tariff and the time available. Candidates need to focus on developing textual cohesion through effective paragraphing and structuring their writing. At all times have the intended reader in mind and make word level, sentence level and text level choices with a clear

understanding of the intended effect. Writing should be seen as a crafted artefact and students should be taught the skills of writing with this in mind whatever the task may be.

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