



**General Certificate of Secondary Education**

**English Literature**  
**Specification 4710**

**47102H: Poetry across time**

**Report on the Examination**  
*2012 Examination – June series*

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## GCSE English Literature 4710

### Principal Examiner's Report Unit 2 (47102H)

This was the first certificated series of this component, and once again appears to have been very successful overall. Students were prepared for the demands of the paper, evidenced in the good use of time and the minority of rubric infringements. Students appeared to be, in the vast majority, entered for the correct tier, with few examples of difficulty with the level of challenge. Again, schools appeared to focus on one particular cluster, with few examples of students from one school responding to more than one of the four.

#### SECTION A

##### Character and Voice

Both questions elicited some very enthusiastic responses. 'Checkin' Out Me History' and 'Ozymandias' appeared to be popular poems that students had lots to say about. In the main, Question 1 afforded lots of comparisons with 'Singh Song', with a strong focus on the use of language and dialect, which appears to have been the main focus for comparison. However, this could sometimes lead to some limiting comments, with students coming unstuck after they had made the more obvious points about how 'both speakers speak in dialect which shows they are proud of where they come from', etc. The students who did better with this question were those who really engaged with the feelings and ideas in both. 'Singh Song' offers the opportunity for some sophisticated interpretation, and some students produced eloquent, engaging readings of how the light-hearted tone masks some very deep feeling. One senior examiner commented: '...the comparisons never felt forced but flowed from the literature on the page. The persona in 'Singh Song' was often depicted by students as warm and sympathetic and they were able to infer the idea that both poems were critical of dominant ideologies – 'Singh Song' was particularly well explored in terms of the marriage undermining the culture of the parents and the generation gap.'

By far and away the most popular point of comparison with 'Ozymandias' was 'The River God'. There were some breath-taking readings of this poem in particular, with clear evidence of real engagement with the ideas and the writer's purpose. 'My Last Duchess' was also a very popular and successful choice.

##### Place

Place was, once again, less in evidence as a cluster than the other three. Of the two questions, Question 4 was far more popular, with students writing enthusiastically about 'Hard Water', often using 'The Blackbird of Glanmore' to draw some interesting parallels about the ways places can have an emotional effect on us. Students who chose 'London' made some very interesting comparisons between the personal and universal effects of places on people.

##### Conflict

The comparisons between 'Mametz Wood' and 'Futility', by far the most common pairing, were often superlative in their engagement. Without a doubt it was Questions 5 and 6 where the widest range of second poem was in evidence. 'Poppies', 'The Falling Leaves' and 'The Yellow Palm' were all used very effectively for Question 5, with 'Bayonet Charge' proving to be the most popular choice to compare with 'The Charge of the Light Brigade'.

##### Relationships

As in previous series, this is clearly a popular cluster. Both questions proved to be equally accessible, and there were lots of examples of students having plenty to say about the feelings in both 'Quickdraw' and 'Praise Song'. What was particularly striking was the level of

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confidence with which some students were able to explore levels of ambiguity in the former, offering reasoned and questioning explorations of the interpretations this poem affords. This was slightly less successful with 'Praise Song' as some students appeared to be convinced that the speaker was describing an estranged relationship. Whilst this is, of course, an interpretation of the poem, it doesn't afford any real exploration as students will quite quickly find they don't have much to say.

However, this cluster also produced the most examples of students struggling with the perceived imperative to say something about structure and/or form. This, in the words of one senior examiner, resulted in: '...the usuals—being invited to turn all sorts of poems upside down etc, and the castles of invention built on what is not there, e.g. "Harmonium is not a sonnet, which shows that the persona does not love his father....."'

## **SECTION B**

Once again, this section was not only a joy to mark, but demonstrated very effectively what students can achieve in a short space of time when they are asked to think for themselves. In the words of one examiner: 'it's always fascinating to see what students can do when they haven't been 'taught' the response to the poem and on the whole they do this well.' There were consistent examples of students employing a level of skill which, had they adopted the same approach to Section A, would have led to more success overall. Given the limited time available, choosing two or three elements of the poem to explore in detail allowed students often to surpass their achievements in Section A. There were strong links made between AO1 and AO2, and the examining team over and over again found that: 'the collective response to this poem provided a powerful argument against those whose idea of 'English' focuses on the mechanical functionality of language, rather than on its role in moving emotions and shaping ideas by way of literature.'

### General Points

- Where students performed at their best, they were focusing on depth rather than 'coverage'. They were engaging with ideas and then using the poems to explore and analyse how ideas and themes were communicated.
  - The most reductive approaches, without exception, were the ones where the candidate clung to an acronym as the means by which to structure their response; 'using the acronym as a checklist rather than a guide', in the words of one member of the team. Another examiner pointed to the limitations of an approach whereby students: 'had been indoctrinated in the deployment of a mechanised strategy that produced overly mechanical responses. Invariably, students made – in sequence – comments on narrative, voice, language (usually words, with an occasional reference to a poetic device), structure (usually a generalised remark about line lengths) and finally, a comparative paragraph. This, in itself, need not be quite so limiting, except for the fact that many students seemed to feel the imperative to 'cover' their formula rather than focus on the poem and what interesting things they might bring to bear on the text.' Another senior examiner described the fact that: 'some pupils were hindered by formulaic acronyms which at times produced a 'paint by numbers' approach to responding to the question.'
  - Comparison remains an issue with some students, as commented on in previous reports. Some students are still adopting the 'Poem A + Poem B = comparative summary' approach. Others are moving between the two poems, however merely juxtaposing them rather than actually 'dealing' with an idea, or a theme, or a point, with both.
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- Personal response appears to be a stumbling block. Students who think that they will gain more marks for comments such as: 'I really liked this poem, it made me think', or, perhaps even more common: 'I think the poet has been really clever in the way that...'
  - As in previous series, it is really important to once again stress that using technical detail as a framework and foundation for writing, rather than an aid to understanding meaning, limits candidate performance. Statements pointing out the use of enjambment for example, or the fact that a poem is written 'in free verse' or with 'a rhyme scheme', tended to lead to some rather generalised comments which offered very little in terms of developing understanding of ideas and themes. Language and technique is most successfully analysed when linked explicitly to themes and ideas rather than in isolation.
  - Once again, the senior team would like to reinforce the message that asking students to 'turn the poem on its side' may, in lots of cases, send them in quite a limiting direction. Once they have pointed out that 'we can see the outline of the Eiffel Tower' in *In Paris With You*, or the 'outline of a grassy ditch' in *Hour*, they quickly find that this isn't taking them anywhere interesting. One of the most outlandish examples of this method was seen from the candidate who said, in response to 'Children in Wartime', that, on turning the poem on its side, 'the reader can see clusters of frightened children'.
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