



General Certificate of Secondary Education

English Literature

Specification 4710

Unit 47101H/1F (Exploring modern texts)

Higher and Foundation tiers

Report on the Examination

2012 Examination – January series

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Set and published by the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance.

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GCSE English Literature 4710

Exploring Modern Texts – 47101H – January 2012

The standard of entries seems to be much higher than last January or last June, showing that (a) students had had longer to prepare for the examination and their responses were more mature and developed, as one would expect from Year 11 students as opposed to Year 10 students and (b) teachers had had more time to assimilate the assessment objectives, the mark schemes, the advice given in previous Principal Examiner's Reports and the demands of the question paper, especially where these demands were different from the legacy specification such as in Section B of the paper.

Statistical evidence reveals that all questions were attempted – thus all texts have been studied. However minority texts either may not have been seen by senior examiners at all or senior examiners may only have seen a small number of responses. This should be taken into consideration especially with questions 9, 11, 12, 15, 16, 22, 23 and, of course, 25.

Section A: Modern prose or drama

Sunlight on the Grass

Question 1

This task revealed that some students did not know *Something Old, Something New* very well. Instead of an understanding of how the family is presented to us by the writer, there was a tendency to make generalised remarks about Muslim families and then list all the things that happen to the protagonist. Other students, however, wrote well about cultural beliefs and traditions and explored the protagonist's discomfort within the family; some interesting responses were able to apply a gender reading to the story. However, whilst quotations were usually selected very well and embedded into the responses, there was a marked tendency to fail to identify language/structural techniques used by the writer. Often students were more successful at addressing AO2 in the second part of the question, especially if they wrote about the broken family in *Compass and Torch*. In particular, this story prompted students to examine the symbolism of the compass and torch in the portrayal of the father/son relationship. *Anil* and *When The Wasps Drowned* also led to some effective answers.

Question 2

Some responses to this question referred only to the first part of the question and thus explained how they felt at the ending of *When the Wasps Drowned* without considering how the writer had manipulated and set up this response. As a result, there was a tendency among the weaker responses to simply list their feelings without any relation to the text. Moreover, many were so overcome with indignation that the children had been left alone by their mother in the summer holidays, that they didn't address the questionable morality of Eveline's actions at the end. Indeed, there was even a tendency to consider her silence entirely justifiable because of the trauma of being left alone to look after her siblings. In a similar way, some students became sidetracked with an unfruitful (and lengthy) discussion about whether the policemen were real policemen or not, leaving little time to examine the children's denial or the final impact of the last line. Those who did examine the final line, however, fared well and began to get to the heart of the ideas behind this story. Better responses linked the ending with the growth of the protagonist from the beginning of the story, her responsibility for the children and her childish attempts to be more grown up with her 'smartie-red lips' and self-fashioned bikini bottom, while also evoking reader sympathy for the child who should not hold such responsibility. *The Darkness Out There* was a particularly successful choice for the second part with some students impressively sustaining a discussion about darkness and innocence in relation to the impact of the ending.

William Golding: *Lord of the Flies*

Question 3

The best responses to this task were highly engaged with the task and explored Simon as a device used by Golding to represent goodness / sanctity / insight. Some saw him as Golding's mouthpiece to utter the truth about the 'human condition'. These responses were selective in their choice of details to support their views or to explore themes. Weaker responses tended to be character studies which went through the novel in chronological order, commenting about Simon and supporting ideas. These responses said little – if anything – about Simon's importance to the novel.

Question 4

Better responses approached the selected passage in analytical fashion and linked their analysis of the details to the themes of the text, exploring Golding's ideas along the way. Other responses merely described what happens in the extract or quoted from it and then explained meanings. Some responses made some links to the rest of the text but others made none.

Kevin Brooks: *Martyn Pig*

The responses to both questions suggest that this text successfully engages students who are able to empathise with the luckless central character, Martyn Pig. Many went on to address the means by which the author presents the issues of the text, some of whom offered some incisive and very perceptive analysis of the author's purposes and methods.

Question 5

It was helpful if students initially defined the context in which they thought about the terms 'right' and 'wrong'. There were three different readings evident, at an increasingly complex level. Some students related the terms to outcome, working at a rather narrative level; responses were based on which decisions turned out well or badly for Martyn. Others turned the question back to themselves on a similarly narrative base, considering the difference between what Martyn thought was best for himself, in contrast to their own judgments. Both related the task to outcomes. Finally, many interpreted the terms in moral terms, judging the intrinsic goodness or 'evil' of his decisions.

There was evidence of the usefulness of this text as a classroom reader, giving rise to some lively discussions. One student commented on Alex's final deceiving of her 'friend': 'My classmates thought that what she did to Martyn was outrageous', since he didn't deserve that from his best friend and beloved. The student countered this suggestion by explaining that there was a dual morality evident, since when he 'murdered' his father, disposing of the body without a single tear, then wasn't that equally outrageous? Surely a parent deserves some respect. Most students who took this line agreed that Brooks makes no judgements, but leaves these to the individual reader. He 'tampers with the ideas of right and wrong' to offer a complicated challenge to the reader.

There were various views offered about how the writer presents his ideas; most students agreed that the use of a first person narrator is a way of drawing the reader on to Martyn's side. Others suggested that his favourite TV programmes, detective stories especially *Inspector Morse*, led Martyn into fantasising about himself as the hero/sleuth where the conventions are broken when his side-kick, Alex, betrays him. This is an interesting approach, but nobody actually developed this theory fully. Several students appreciated Brooks's dark humour, especially the counterpointing of father's sudden death with the happy-family advert on 'chicken tonight'.

Question 6

This question elicited some intelligent and thoughtful work. Students were aware of the effects of a changed setting upon Martyn's thoughts, as it freed him from the usual darkness of home into a more carefree place. Links were made between the colours used here and those at home, especially the darkness associated with the problems caused by his father both in life and in death. Blackness was also linked to the character Dean.

Students agreed that a new side of Martyn was being offered, away from the horrible pressures of his miserable life. For the first time he is presented as enjoying himself, even if this pleasure is found in isolation. Above all his imagination is allowed to roam beyond the world of the detective genre.

The metaphorical significance of the scene was noted, 'as if I'd stepped into another world'; it was indicative of isolation and alienation. This mood was seen to be intensified with the references to himself as 'alone', a 'tiny black dot', 'shapeless'. The idea of 'white darkness' indicates further a paradox since he is both purified and yet lost in his own consciousness. Other students noted that Alex appeared 'like an angel' as her eyelids 'flicker like excited wings'. This promising line of enquiry needed a little more development to suggest the visionary nature of the experience, almost religious in its intensity. The timing is significant, a few days before Christmas and the memory of the birth of Christ. The snowflakes, images of purity, wipe out the imperfections of the beach. Then Alex appears, gliding over the water in an otherworldly way, dressed in white. It is 'candle white' - clearly a religious reference. With these two ideas juxtaposed, perhaps it may be claimed that Brooks is presenting first alienation, dislocation from normality, and then a visionary experience with religious overtones. As several students suggested, Martyn is being 'cleansed'; as he says he looks like 'a newborn baby'.

Susan Hill: *The Woman in Black*

There were some wonderful, enthusiastic and engaged responses to this novel. Many students were able to write about it with a clear view of the text as a literary construct, focusing on the narrative techniques and the effects on the reader in a way which showed a clear and exact understanding of the writer's methods and intentions; indeed, students seem to write about the writer's methods in a most unforced way. Some students considered Kipps' reliability as a narrator in a way which showed a real ability to 'step back' from the plot and think about the writer. Also, the text seems to engage students of all abilities.

Question 7

This was chosen by fewer students. However, responses were very good and students could explore a number of techniques such as pathetic fallacy, use of description, imagery, use of first person narrator [and more] with skill.

Question 8

This was more popular and even more successful. A senior examiner noted that she was truly humbled by the best responses to this question; indeed, the best responses she had ever read in all her years as an examiner. She said that they were a delight to read and made her go back and read the novel again with renewed insight. These students wrote with sophistication and subtlety, exploring and evaluating the ways Hill builds up the sense of horror at the end of the novel. Comments on the setting, the contrast between this and the rest of the novel, the way the writer builds on what the reader already knows, the reader's prior knowledge of the horror genre and the mental state of the narrator showed a complete understanding of the writer's craft and her manipulation of the reader's responses.

Joe Simpson: *Touching the Void*

Question 9

This was the less popular of the two questions and many of the students' responses seen by senior examiners tended to go through the ending and what was happening to Simpson and how he felt, with little reference to how language and/or structure were used for effect.

Question 10

Many more students chose this task and some students, as with question 9, tended to simply explain what happens in the chapter with some reference to Simpson's feelings but with little reference to AO2. However, better responses came from students who confidently examined the creation of tension and suspense, demonstrating some sophisticated skills when addressing both AO1 and AO2. There was some consideration of the dual narrative and the use of short or broken sentences – and pauses – to slow down the narrative and create 'unbearable tension'. The actual decision to cut the rope was addressed by some students who were split in their responses. An emotional response to the 'wrongness' of Simon's decision seemed to ignore Joe's clear explanation of the unbreakable 'contract' between climbers facing such a life and death situation; there was little sympathy despite the dreadful decision Simon had to make. This could have elicited more exploration. Is it worse to make a deadly decision rather than helplessly awaiting the results of this choice? Perhaps it would have been useful to consider the 'void' of the title here; Simpson was overhanging the void; the decision was void of any doubts or choices; above all, he was facing the void when life departs. Similarly Simon faced the void after a decision which might well deprive him of his friend who might plummet into the void below. The ironic dual narrative structure captured the terrible fears and doubts of both climbers, each unaware of the other's thoughts. How exactly did Joe face possible death? As a pragmatist, taking what life threw at him, aware of the risks and some lack of preparation before they started; he had taken a gamble and was prepared to accept the consequences which informs the attempt at a matter of fact tone and disciplined language, betrayed by certain factors such as the hesitations, exclamations and swearing.

Dylan Thomas: *Under Milk Wood*

Question 11 and Question 12

Very few students responded to this text but there was some evidence that both questions were answered with some degree of success; especially noteworthy were some imaginative responses to the use of music and singing in the play.

Arthur Miller: *The Crucible*

Question 13

This was the more popular choice of question on what is becoming a popular choice of text. This question was fairly competently answered by most students in that they were able to monitor the various stages of understanding that Hale undergoes through the course of the play. However, there was a tendency for a number of responses to become little more than a list of the key changes in Hale rather than an analysis of the ways in which Miller showed the changes. Nonetheless, many students were able to track the changes from Hale's over confidence at the beginning to his doubts in the middle, to his remorse and despair at his involvement in proceedings by the end of the play. Some students also restricted the range of their responses by concentrating solely on Hale and his own words without exploring the ways in which he interacted with other characters and/or situations. Those students who were able to break free of these limitations referred to a variety of situations and conversations which revealed in some detail Hale's increasing doubt and the way in which this culminated in his denunciation of the court. Stronger responses explored and evaluated Miller's techniques, including stage directions – thus demonstrating a focus on the text as a play to be performed.

Question 14

There were some insightful exploratory responses to this task but there were also some weaker responses which struggled with the concept of freedom. The former were often quite liberated and adventurous responses in that the students were able to interpret 'freedom' in the play. Indeed, freedom was perceived in various ways: children and the young had to behave in certain ways so Abigail and the girls found it in the woods but their freedom caused the catastrophe. Freedom was seen to be a burden in Proctor's adultery, yet this is what he sought in refusing to sign a confession. Freedom also signified a lack of sin and release from the Devil's thrall for the inhabitants of Salem. It was felt that Miller portrayed freedom most movingly when Hale was freed from his ignorance into human sympathy and an awareness of true Christian values, unknown to the theocracy. Again, students considered the stage directions at the climax of the play 'when Hale, on his knees with tears rolling down his face is evidence of how oppression and lack of freedom can beat even the strongest in the village'.

Diane Samuels: *Kindertransport*

One senior examiner reported that she felt that this text deserves more consideration by schools as a possible focus for study; it was not an especially popular choice for this exam. Responses were sensitive to the text, and students on the whole were very aware of the staging devices, which indicated they had either watched a performance or acted out sections themselves. This enabled them to select confidently features of structure and form as well as language to support their responses.

Question 15

Most students answered this question, with several moving beyond the more obvious mother/daughter relationships to explore, for example, Evelyn's relationship with Eva and Eva/Evelyn's relationship with the Ratcatcher. Students explored the biological/ adoptive parent idea. There was some excellent exploration of structural methods such as parallels and contrasts.

Question 16

The best responses were by students who explored the link of their chosen characters with the Ratcatcher and considered the dramatic function of their characters. Most students were able to consider the presentation and function of their chosen characters.

J.B. Priestley: *An Inspector Calls***Question 17**

This was the most popular question in Section A and was done well [or better!] by those students who chose it. Students were very comfortable with the concept of 'responsibility' in the play and the question was accessible to students of all abilities. They tended to show a good grasp of Priestley's ideas about responsibility and they were able to see the play as a vehicle for the writer to convey these ideas to the audience. The more successful responses saw the text as a play and were able to write about aspects of staging and dramatic devices, referring to 'audience' rather than 'reader' and 'play' rather than 'novel'. These responses also made excellent use of details, both from stage directions and from dialogue. The opening stage directions, for example, were often seen to be used by Priestley to place Mr Birling as an unattractive character who cannot provide a family home with any warmth. Tracking these throughout the play revealed what should have been his progress towards a sense of collective responsibility. At first he self importantly *clears his throat*; unnerved by the inspector he is described as speaking *sharply, shocked*; relieved by the telephone call to the hospital he is seen to act *triumphantly* and finally he is presented as *panic-stricken*. But most students agreed that he would only be worried about himself and the good name of his family. Money and power determined his ethos. There were lively discussions in a similar vein about Mrs Birling and most students felt that Priestly presented a clear generation gap with the hopes for an optimistic future firmly placed with Sheila and to a lesser degree Eric. The playwright's strongly didactic intent was grasped by all students who picked up the irony in Birling's reference to WW1 and the Titanic. Towards the lower end of the mark range students tended to recount the events of

the play, sometimes highlighting the extent of each character's responsibility in the death of Eva Smith.

Question 18

On the whole, this question was not as well done as Question 17. Some students wrote everything they knew about Gerald and failed to address the second part of the question about the writer's methods. A surprising number failed to view Gerald with any ambivalence, stating confidently that he was a true gentleman who only wanted to help Eva. Of course those who saw him as a more complicated character with traits of both the older, more selfish, Birling parents and the younger, more impressionable, Birling children, scored much more highly. These students were able to respond to the several shifts in sympathy Priestley manoeuvres in relation to Gerald and were often able to appreciate his use as a device to channel Priestley's political and moral beliefs.

Dennis Kelly: *DNA*

Question 19

This task was the more popular of the two questions and was, by and large, done better than Question 20. There were many very good responses: better ones seeing the 'absent' Adam as a device for Kelly to explore his ideas about gangs, the loss of individual conscience and the alienation from society of differing groups and individuals. Weaker responses were still able to comment on the 'absent' Adam still being the focus of many characters' conversations and therefore essential to the ideas being discussed. Those who struggled a little more tended to identify Adam's role in events and not much more than that. Nonetheless, it was felt that the task proved an accessible way to students across the range to respond to the text.

Question 20

There was, by and large, a sense of struggle in relation to this task. Many just referred to any mention of DNA in the text and then said that is why the play is so named. Many students struggled with the more abstract nature of the task.

Section B: Exploring cultures

John Steinbeck: *Of Mice and Men*

Question 21

As with the legacy specification, this is an overwhelmingly popular text which continues to engage and interest students across the ability range. The majority of students understand the text and its contexts well. However, there remain some students who perhaps do not do their understanding justice in response to the tasks. Some struggle with the precise nature of the tasks and are not always clear how to address the assessment objectives – especially those which relate to the writer and to contexts.

Responses to this task were spread across the full range of the tier. Weaker responses provided a simple paraphrased version of the extract punctuated with quotes or details to support. These responses tended to focus on meanings rather than on how Steinbeck is using, for instance, language in the passage. In an attempt to interpret details, some students offered ideas which were rather far-fetched [to put it mildly] and not really in line with Steinbeck's intentions. The key to this section is to select fewer details to explore/analyse rather than a list of many followed by their meanings. Better responses showed careful thought about what the details of the passage might add to our understanding of the bunkhouse and its inhabitants. There were many engaged and moving responses. Sensible comments were often made about the magazine and the cards – about the 'secret' hopes and dreams the men might have and how they hide these from each other, reinforcing the idea of loneliness and self-sufficiency in the novel and about the fact that they waste their money gambling, rather than saving their money for the future. Some students analysed how the impersonal and harsh environment of the bunkhouse is created by Steinbeck and the significance of the 'sameness' of each bunk. Some students considered the 'one symbol of hope' in the bunkhouse, 'the rushing stars'; yet Steinbeck juxtaposed this symbol with the short-lived, nuisance, ugly black flies buzzing vainly

around. The cast-iron stove, ugly and black, the most pessimistic colour was seen as an indicator of the utilitarian, featureless lives of the ranchmen.

In part b] the larger context is invited, in this case American society at its harshest. The contexts include the political, economic, social and geographical factors for which the ranch workers are representatives of the problems of the age. Two difficulties tended to occur. Students wrote generally about contexts, typically the Wall Street Crash, the American Dream, loneliness, poverty, etc., without referring to the characters, their problems and details from the text about them. Others tended to do the opposite and write exclusively about the characters and their problems, but didn't relate them to the larger context. However, better responses selected and analysed carefully selected contextual details. These students aware of the 'weaknesses of the sad little bunch underprivileged through sex, race or disability'. Their lives were seen as unrewarding, without comfort or beauty, devoid of any true prospects despite the illusionary American dream.

Steinbeck's text proved to be as popular and accessible as ever.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: *Purple Hibiscus*

Question 22

Although not an overly popular text, students clearly knew the text well and could select information and events connected to Mama. The best responses were both interesting and lively, with links drawn between the political situation in Nigeria and the dynamics of the family; even the passivity of Mama was understood and was really well exemplified and explained. However, other students failed to explore either the set passage or the rest of the novel. There was perhaps some confusion about the fact that the passage was the basis for the consideration of context [although this is something which has been done on previous papers]. In part a) some responses were a little muddled and jumped between the passage and the book but most fared better on part b). Lots of students picked up on the analytical possibilities of the lipstick but were less confident when considering dialogue.

Lloyd Jones: *Mister Pip*

Question 23

Whilst not an overly popular choice, this text was perhaps handled better than in previous sittings of the exam. Some students were able to write something of substance about Jones' use of language in part a); others were less successful although some of these were able to address AO2 in part b) which is, of course, fine. Some focussed primarily of the use of the word 'ghost' and its significance. Few students were able to comment on, for instance, the use of the short sentences to highlight the contrast in perspective between the grandfather and the yachtsman; few also picked up on the comic effect implicit in the passage. Some students struggled to be specific about contextual issues in part b) and, in some cases, there was limited focus on the later stages of the novel. Other students were more confident in this section where they were, of course, able to make choices about what they wrote about.

Harper Lee: *To Kill a Mockingbird*

Question 24

Weaker responses wrote about how Lee uses details to present Miss Maudie's view of Maycomb by writing a paraphrase of the passage punctuated by quotes from it. The misunderstanding of the line '*We're the safest folks in the world,*' said Miss Maudie caused problems for many students who thought it meant that Maycomb was the most secure, happy place in the world to live and then had problems reconciling that idea with the issues of, for example, racism explored in the rest of the extract. In stronger responses details of Miss Maudie's view were linked appropriately to themes and ideas explored in the text as a whole. Characters were seen as constructs to do this, e.g the young Jem questioning an older and wiser character about Maycomb society. Too often, across the range of responses, students fail to address AO2, focussing more on meaning than methods.

Part B

In this part, students were able to identify the precise context immediately – ‘small town’ / ‘1930s America’. A majority wrote successfully about Lee’s presentation of life in a town such as Maycomb. Students were knowledgeable about the town on many levels, - physical features, nature of small town mentality, social hierarchy, attitudes to education, women, race, etc. Many students were able to discuss – or explore – prejudice effectively, using Tom as an example, but they also drew upon Boo Radley being ostracised because of the town’s narrow-mindedness; some students offered a gender reading of the text. Stronger students’ responses were firmly rooted in the text whilst weaker responses gave a social commentary without such detail. Once again, some students used contextual details effectively and took the opportunity to address different aspects of AO2; others less so.

Doris Pilkington: *Rabbit-Proof Fence*

Question 25

Senior Examiners saw no responses to this question

A few ideas follow which may inform teaching and preparation for future exams:

- It is helpful to make students aware of the different types of task and how to approach them. Character questions usually appeal to students but they must guard against ‘character studies’ and be mindful of the task which may ask about the ‘importance’ or ‘significance’ of a character. Characters must be seen as literary constructs not real people. Questions which ask about the beginning or ending of a text [sometimes there may be an extract on the paper, sometimes not] require particular attention in that students need to be able to relate details of the beginning/ending to the rest of the text should the question so request. Questions which ask about themes require the student to select material relevant to that theme – how much and what is selected is important; sometimes students try to cover too much content at the expense of consideration/exploration. This is not an exhaustive range of types of question but it may offer teachers food for thought.
- Students who study a play tend to fare better if they demonstrate in their responses that it **is** a play to be seen by an audience. These students often make good use of stage directions, for example, to support their ideas.
- A minority of students who studied ‘Sunlight on the Grass’ compared the two stories; there is no requirement to do this.
- Whilst there is significantly more balance between the marks on Section A and on Section B than on previous years, some students still struggle to address the assessment objectives in Section B. AO2 may be addressed in either part a] or part b] or both. Contextual issues should be addressed where they are required although they may also be credited, if relevant, wherever they appear. Lengthy descriptions of contextual issues should be avoided and responses should be rooted in **details** from the text.
- Students need to understand the difference between selecting quotations and explaining what they mean and selecting quotations and, for example, appreciating or analysing the writer’s use of language.
- Several senior examiners observed that there was a not inconsiderable number of students who may have been served better by the questions on the foundation tier.

It is pleasing to see young people enjoying and engaging with the texts they have studied and they are to be applauded for their efforts. Teachers have had the challenge of delivering a new specification and are doing sterling work in preparing their students for the exam. The high level of entry so far would suggest that many schools are opting for the English Language / English Literature combination, thus offering their students the opportunity to experience all that literary texts have to offer, including the development of a range of skills. Long may this continue.

GCSE English Literature 4710

Exploring Modern Texts – 47101F – January 2012

January 2012 is the third sitting of English Literature Unit 1, for the new specification. To reiterate what was said in June 2011, there is clear evidence that schools are very aware of their students and have opted for successful text choices to compliment their students' abilities. Teaching methods are equally evident in responses, demonstrating teachers guiding their students' to respond to all the assessment objectives. Interestingly, as in previous series, *An Inspector Calls* and *Of Mice and Men* are still by far the most popular choices although a spread of texts was seen. Students are clearly demonstrating engagement with many of the texts studied and for foundation students this is wonderful to see – I do hope schools continue to encourage all students to share and enjoy texts and appreciate the value that Literature brings. Another point that was noted by the senior team was that the Section B responses often suffered by being the second and shorter response; timing is possibly the problem here.

Many students demonstrated a clear understanding of the Assessment Objectives and the requirements of the mark scheme, both in modern prose or drama and exploring cultures; however one assessment objective was clearly weaker than the rest in both sections – AO2 writer's methods. As with the legacy specification, it still appears to be a challenge to ask students to comment on the writer and see the text as a 'construct'. Having said that, several students showed wonderful awareness of writer's methods and dealt with this strand admirably. The new assessment objective in Section B – AO4 personal response to context was embraced by many of the students and they appeared to enjoy being able to explain the historical, social context of the novel. However, teachers should note that there seemed to be a tendency from some students to treat the paper as a three-part question paper i.e. students seemed to think they had to produce TWO 'formal essays' for Section B; ideally students would be better served to learn how to blend the textual piece more 'cohesively' with the wider context response for section B. The weaker papers definitely suffered from lack of contextual knowledge and the ability to apply it to the question given. There appeared to be more evidence of students being able to respond to the passage given in part A of the question suggesting that more focus on close textual analysis had taken place between June 2011 and this exam series.

There were some frustratingly regular infringements of the rubric of the paper, resulting in some weaker students scoring fewer marks than if they had written just one response for each section, as clearly instructed! This is still particularly evident for the Anthology questions where some students felt they had to produce responses to both questions. Even more frustratingly a few students only did part (a) of a question and had to be penalised as per the rubric. It might be prudent for teachers and invigilators to find ways to combat these errors; on many occasions it cost students dearly in the final marks for the paper.

More students were entered than in January but the entry is still not large - it must be remembered that comments on responses to the texts, in this report, may be based on the work of a relatively small number of students.

Section A: Modern prose or drama

Sunlight on the Grass

Students demonstrated some wonderful engagement with these short stories and appeared to be able to deal with both sections equally. In addition, the anthology saw a lot of students thinking they had to respond to both questions – this of course meant that both responses were lacking detail as students rushed through their responses. It did appear that some schools saw the anthology as an appropriate set of texts for weaker students and whilst they dealt with their responses in some detail, they found it hard to move to the ‘explained’ section of the mark scheme evidenced with other texts. Senior examiners noted that generally Question 2 was more successfully dealt with than question 1.

Question 1

This was less popular than question two. *Something Old Something New* seemed quite a hard story for the students to address method. The students were happy to express feelings and did discuss the feelings of the lovers and the brother. The weaker students just listed some of the feelings without looking at HOW they had been presented so missed out on marks via the assessment objectives. The second story choices were varied and this was pleasing to see although the most likely pairings were *On Seeing the 100% Perfect Girl* and *Compass and Torch*. Some very good students even managed to make comparisons across the stories demonstrating real engagement with the collection even though this wasn’t a skill being tested.

Question 2

This was the most popular of the two anthology questions. Responses were generally good, although it was surprising to see some students only focusing on the pleasant, weak side of Mrs Rutter. Better answers dealt with the nasty side too and this enabled students to score reasonably in AO2 (.4 and .5) as they had a good understanding of Mrs Rutter’s hidden “darkness”. Second text responses were varied but the better answers often focused on minor characters –for instance Anil’s father or Marimuthu - this seemed to help the focus and the explanation of how the character was presented. Students demonstrated clear engagement with the stories and enjoyment of these texts.

Lord of the Flies: William Golding

Only a few responses were seen by senior examiners. There were some very pleasing responses with clear engagement and detailed understanding of the text.

Question 3

A few answers were seen on Roger, however they mainly dealt with him in a practical acknowledgment of what he said and did thereby missing assessment objectives as they didn’t ‘explain’ or address the method’s strand.

Question 4

This was the most fruitful of the *Lord of the Flies* questions, as students were well prepared with examples of the progression/deterioration of the relationship between the two boys. Most students were clear on the respect and points of friendship between Jack and Ralph, and also Jack’s descent into savagery.

Martyn Pig: Kevin Brooks

Very few examples were seen by senior examiners this time and it appeared that this text was only tackled by weaker students. (Please note this isn’t the usual expectation for this text as wonderful responses have been seen in previous exam series – it could be that the better schools were not seen by senior examiners!)

The Auntie Jean question, **Question 5**, (was most popular and successful, even though the writer strand presented difficulties. Weaker students offered a narrative approach with Auntie Jean but better ones saw via A02 that the reader's response to her might be complex. Sadly none of them mentioned Martyn as the narrator.

Question 6 gave better students a chance to convey their liking of the book and valid attempts were made to show the "writer at work". This question tended to produce very vague answers sadly - one lad commenting "It was a bit long for me."

***The Woman in Black* : Susan Hill**

A few responses were seen and they covered both questions.

Question 7

Discussion of language was covered well, and students were able to relate the idea of fog to the rest of the novel. However, they did less on how tension is developed in the novel as a whole. The use of an extract seemed to be enjoyed by the students.

Question 8

Students produced good detailed knowledge on the character question by showing familiarity with Samuel Daily but answers tended to be based more on his actions rather than Hill's presentation of him. As a result A01 tended to be covered rather than A02.

***Touching the Void*: Joe Simpson**

A few responses were seen by senior examiners. Generally there were a number of good responses for the first bullet point but again some still struggled with method.

Question 9

Many found it really difficult to respond to the word "exciting." Some students tried to argue that they did not find the text exciting which is fine as a response but they seemed ill prepared to be able to respond to writer when offering an alternative viewpoint.

Question 10

This was the most popular and well answered question for this text; students were able to respond effectively to Simon's feelings.

***Under Milk Wood*: Dylan Thomas**

Question 11

A few answers were seen but they tended to be quite short not moving through to any explanation of Polly; as a result they were mainly supported response and comments on details. Students knew the play well and quoted (often at too much length) references to Little Willie Wee. Polly is seen as a proud and carefree character, but sometimes as someone with no self-respect. As one student said, "I personally think it's not normal for a mum to do"! Better answers empathise with Polly's constant sorrow for Willie's death and her loss of the possibility of a happy family life. The more successful responses did see a confident, life affirming side to Polly and were sensitive to the techniques Dylan Thomas uses to show irony and variety of tones in her speech.

Question 12

Again, Dylan Thomas seemed to produce weaker answers from students. They were able to establish the two characters and what they dreamed of, but struggled with the assessment objective on reference to writer. A student noted and quoted 'wordplay' such as "the seesaw sea", "which reminds me of the water being wavey" but this was rarely seen.

The Crucible: Arthur Miller

Question 13

This question was not as popular as question 14 and senior examiners reported it wasn't dealt with as well as question 14. Many wrote about hysteria and the situation getting out of control ...but then McCarthyism was often thrown in, as if for 'Good luck', with no real understanding, or clarification of the term, or how it might relate to this text!

There were some very basic answers seen covering mainly Band 2, with some clear response and range of details and students wrote mainly about what the characters say and do.

Question 14

Often the better of the two responses. However, comments from senior examiners have been incredibly varied ranging from students being able to write about Abigail's 'manipulative' qualities, citing e.g. from the crying out scene with comments often linked to method - the language she uses / terrorising the other girls etc., to other examiners stating that students offered only superficial answers referencing events rather than her character.

'Power' was a key word explored in depth in the better responses, and in the context of method - HOW Miller had 'made' Abigail powerful / manipulative / controlling etc.

Kindertransport: Diane Samuels

Senior examiners saw no responses to this text.

An Inspector Calls: J.B. Priestley

This was the most popular text by far and both questions were equally attempted. Even weaker students recognised Priestley's message through the Inspector and understood the contrast between Birling and Eric.

Question 17

Senior examiners commented on seeing lots of 'competent' responses, attaining high Band 4 and above. Many students engaged well with the question and commonly cited examples / references included: the change in 'atmosphere' when the Inspector enters as well as the use of props to develop the line of questioning. Comments often managed to explore 'method' in some detail, citing examples of 'stage direction', 'pink lighting' etc.; many students wrote about the EFFECT of the 'photograph' being shown to just one character at a time and the better responses tackled the Inspector's speeches, and developed points relating to the 'control' he had within the play.

The Inspector was seen by the more successful students as a mouthpiece for Priestley, so the moral message of "socialism" was generally understood and marks gained in 4.4 and 4.5. Often a clear and detailed knowledge of the text, highlighting the Inspector's dealing with each character and their attitude, seemed to achieve a mid mark in Band 4. Students were generally engaged by the character of the Inspector and enjoyed the clash between his approach and the reaction of the Birling family and Gerald Croft. (One pleasant slip of the pen produced a new slant on the regular statement that the name Goole referred to ghoul, introducing a new character, Inspector Google.)

Question 18

Again, students seemed to find this accessible and even the weaker students developed the hooks in the question, with 'their different attitudes' being a strong lead-in. Many recognised that Eric and Arthur Birling had 'different attitudes' to the death of Eva Smith, and to 'responsibility'. The better responses explored the ways in which Eric changed during the course of the play, whereas Arthur Birling did not learn the same lessons.

The contrast between Arthur and Eric Birling was seen easily at the 3.4 level but there was more of a struggle to see the moral stance each character struck in Band 4. Many observed the juxtaposition of the two men's viewpoints on society and also the difference in their willingness to change was seen by most. Lots of students commented on the dramatic irony of Arthur Birling's words regarding the Titanic and the War. Weaker answers became so involved in the story of the characters that they forgot to look at how the author shaped the character and their thoughts/ actions.

The better responses grasped the idea that eventually the two men might represent the two sides of a generational and ideological divide. However, the detailed understanding of the effect of specific language or stagecraft choices to create particular effects was slightly weaker than in question 17.

DNA: Denis Kelly

One senior examiner quoted: "The responses to the two 'DNA' questions were genuinely enjoyable to mark. As with responses to 'Martyn Pig' in previous series, they were 'fresh' and 'Lit Crit - free!' Students had obviously engaged well with the text in the classroom, and consequently, they engaged well with both tasks in the examination."

'Themes / ideas/ feelings/ attitudes ' were explored in some detail in both responses, with many students attaining 5.5, even 6.5 for this aspect of their response.

Question 19

This was the most popular, with students having plenty to write about and showing knowledge of Greek chorus. The idea of typical teenagers is something with which students were able to empathise. Most students saw Jan and Mark as the 'narrators' and wrote about the way they conveyed the crucial developments to the audience, at the beginning of each scene. 'Method' was often very well explored, with many students writing about the 'incomplete exchanges' etc., and with strong examples. ('Dead? Yeah, dead..' etc.)

Question 20

The bullets provided good hooks, and students often used these as scaffolding for their response. Many students seemed to enjoy arguing against the view posed in the question, producing some accomplished 'discursive' responses, and again including strong supporting material from the text. Weaker students did find this question difficult and a few students contradicted themselves.

Section B: Exploring Cultures***Of Mice and Men*: John Steinbeck****Question 21**

Again, by far, the most popular text in this section. There were a lot of strong responses with pleasing evidence of 'Method' being developed; many students expressed their ideas with some cogency, writing that 'red connotes danger' etc., although the word 'connotes' is being overused in responses! Many responses dealt with how Steinbeck 'uses' Curley's wife to explore the role of women at the time/ on the ranch / in a 'man's world'.

It was a rarity also to find anyone who understood the implication of the often quoted “nasal, brittle quality” of Curley’s wife’s voice. Her hair, hanging “like sausages”, also produced some unlikely conclusions!

One senior examiner’s team noted that the context is still hindering some students to achieve and although better responses have been seen on the whole this series, I feel it is still valuable to offer examples of errors made by students. Some answers could have an explained response to Curley’s wife, her actions and attitude, examined minutely within the passage, but fail to answer well in terms of context. Often the context would lack supported response and be quite vague thus costing the student in their final marks for this question. A small number of students dealt with Curley’s wife’s action in the passage in some detail but didn’t address Part (b) at all. It was normal for some answers to get side-tracked into a well-supported discussion of the other men, not successfully relating it back to Curley’s wife and women in society, as intended, and other responses offered over simplification in terms of the life choices for women at the time, with many students seeming to believe that it was a straight choice between domesticity or prostitution.

However, a different senior examiner quoted “What was perhaps most moving, however, was the way that even quite weak students engaged with the circumstances and marginalisation of Curley’s wife. Some responses were judgemental, and others showed a great deal of compassion, but almost all students had thought carefully about the issues raised when someone is excluded from their community. Perhaps, this explains the popularity of the novella as a text for study at GCSE. Its power to interest students across the ability range is particularly notable at a time when Literature as a subject is fast disappearing from the curriculum, whilst many more young people become disengaged and disaffected in difficult economic circumstances”.

Purple Hibiscus: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

Question 22

Only a few responses were seen.

From the papers seen it was clear that students knew the text well and had been taught the context. Most students linked Mama’s oppression with that of the oppressive regime in Nigeria. They were able to use the detail of Auntie Ifeoma’s glossy lipstick compared to Mama’s pale/unadorned lips as a symbol of Auntie’s freedom and Mama’s oppression, and explore the wider context of women’s roles in Nigeria.

In addition, the responses were able to talk about other incidents in the novel such as the smashing of Mama’s figurines and Eugene beating her up and losing the baby. Many saw the destruction of the figurines as symbolic of Mama’s own position and were able to sensitively discuss the importance of Mama hiding her abuse by simply carrying on.

In short, very good responses were seen. Every student had similar ideas and quotes which suggested good teaching, an engagement with the text and an empathy with Mama; also every student understood and answered the question – with varying degrees of success.

Weaker responses seen, tended to look at character and a range of detail but were unable to tackle method.

Mister Pip: Lloyd Jones

Question 23

Senior examiners saw no responses to this text.

To Kill a Mockingbird: Harper Lee

Question 24

A few responses were seen. The better students were able to pick out some detail about the Ewells and offer some understanding of how the details informed the reader about the Ewells; however quite a few students did very little with the passage. Students seemed to enjoy discussing the Ewells in other parts of the novel with the majority choosing to discuss their part in the Tom Robinson case, but for the weaker students this fell into a narrative account rather than linking this to what it tells the reader about Maycomb. AO4 on the whole was quite weak but some students did manage to offer supported responses to this assessment objective and the better students led the trial with the Ewells and Atticus into an explanation about Maycomb covering the AO4 objective well.

Rabbit-Proof Fence: Doris Pilkington

Question 25

Senior examiners saw no responses to this text.

As a final note for this report:

Considerable improvement has been seen from responses in June especially in respect of writer's methods and context (section B) and this can be attributed to many factors:

- Longer preparation time for students
- A greater understanding by some schools of the demands and requirements of the assessment objectives

However do note there is still inconsistency in many responses between section A and B. This can only be assumed to be students' time management in the exam or perhaps differences in time given to the different texts.

Clear enjoyment and accessibility of 'foundation' tier students with the texts offered and coverage of every text and every question on the paper, demonstrates that foundation students can cope with and enjoy literature! Schools must be applauded – the value is clear to see.

The main areas still causing some students problems are:

- Writer's methods – actually considering the author's craft and explaining the effect a particular approach or method has on the reader / audience / themes within the text etc
 - More fresh approaches to texts that allow students to demonstrate their enjoyment and understanding rather than rote learning which appears to be hindering students
 - AO4 in section B – linking of general context to move to 'supported context' with a clear and detailed explanation of the link between the two to move to 'explained' responses to context.
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