

Examiners' Report January 2013

GCSE English Literature 5ET2F 01

Understanding Poetry

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Introduction

In this series there were significant numbers of responses where candidates engaged with the nature of poetry. This was particularly evident for the Unseen Poem, where examiners for this tier professed themselves pleased with the quality of response. There were also many sound responses to the Anthology poems, but preparation of some candidates was not always sufficiently thorough. However, in comparison, on both the (a) questions on the named poem and the (b) questions that looked for links and comparative points across two poems, some candidates showed evidence of careful preparation. On the (b) questions, more successful candidates offered sound and clear comparisons, although some weaker candidates struggled to compare the poems effectively, adding a brief comparative conclusion, after treating each poem in isolation. Making more detailed links throughout would have improved their grades as most candidates showed an understanding of each.

Centres might like to consider further helping candidates to find and comment on similarities and differences between two poems, especially in their handling of similar thematic material. For example, in this series many candidates failed to point out the different reactions to, as well as the different types of, prejudice expressed in the named poems selected for comparison.

Question 1

Unseen poem

The poem selected was 'A Piece of Paper' by Julia Biggs, a poem with a thought-provoking 'conversation' between a piece of paper and a lonely child. Candidates responded to this poem insightfully. This question discriminated well and stimulated a variety of responses with a wide range of interesting comments. One experienced examiner commented colourfully, that the poem 'was all the better for spawning a wide range of interpretations'. Stronger candidates were able to deal with the poem soundly, often interestingly, and even most of the weaker ones were able to respond at their level to the ideas and language.

Many candidates wrestled with the ideas of what exactly the piece of black paper represented: racial prejudice and/or slavery; man's disregard for the environment and deforestation; a reflection of the poet herself. Most candidates picked up on the loneliness of both the paper (and the use of personification was noted by stronger candidates) and the narrator. What did distinguish the higher band responses was the candidates' ability to link between the two and to deal successfully with the speaker's guilt and the powerful emotions at the end of the poem. The approach of tracking through the changes of mood in the poem was broadly successful.

Stronger candidates were able to make useful points about language and the imagery. Less confident candidates stuck rigidly to the bullet points: whilst this did ensure that different aspects of the poem were covered, this approach did lend itself to 'tagged-on' comments about language that did not really explore the context of the quotations selected. Weaker candidates would refer to 'feature spotting', with little, or no consideration as to the effect of the technique.

This is the first part of a candidate's response to the Unseen Poem.

SECTION A: UNSEEN POEM

You must answer Question 1 in the space below.

The poem "A Piece of paper" is about a young boy's feelings towards the environment. "I felt ashamed" this tells us he is not happy about the amount of deforestation. In the poem Julia Biggs portrays the paper as being alive. She does this by using personification "it looked kind and lonely" I think the way the boy ~~feels~~ sees the paper is a reflection of his own guilt as ~~the~~ the paper blames mankind for its problems "The Coming of man that who had felled the tree".
~~this p~~

This poem is cleverly written as it gives the tree an opinion which it expresses through out the poem "The paper looked sad" this almost makes us think the ^{Paper} ~~tree~~ is thinking back to when it was a tree it gives the impression that it is a fond memory until man turned up and cut him down.

(Section A continued)

The poem is written in six irregular stanzas. I almost feel this represents the mood swings both the paper and the boy are going through, the final stanza is the shortest which makes its bold statement stand out "I tore up the paper, I tore up myself" I imagine the boy physically tore the paper but metaphorically tore up himself. This represents his moral ~~and~~ views against deforestation going as he can't sleep it so doesn't need the guilt. "Then I got angry. I had ~~enough~~ problems enough without guilt." This shows that the event has already happened "had" it is to stanza 5 is written in past tense but still first person "I got angry".



ResultsPlus
examiner comment

This response is developing a sound understanding of content and ideas. There is an awareness of how the writer uses language to effect. Sound comment is offered on content form and structure. The response fulfils the criteria for the top band.



ResultsPlus
examiner tip

Note how the candidate's interpretations and personal response are justified by being fully supported by the text.

This is the first half of a candidate's response to the Unseen Poem (Q1).

Point Evidence Topic Effect on the Reader
SECTION A: UNSEEN POEM

Meaning Topic Imagery Structure
You must answer Question 1 in the space below.

Julia Biggs presents her thought in different ways after seeing the 'black piece of paper'. She shows mixed emotions, being angry, then feeling ashamed and being guilty for what happened to the paper.

Biggs uses personification when she describes seeing the paper. She describes the paper being sad also being able to talk 'The paper looked sad when it told me about the wind... felled the tree'. The fact that paper doesn't actually talk makes the reader puzzled. In my thoughts the speaker in the poem may be imagining talking to this 'piece of paper' because although we have no evidence directly implying the speaker may not have a stable mental state 'I had problems enough'.

In the poem 'A piece of paper' the speaker is shown to have mixed emotions about seeing 'this black piece of paper' the speaker shows anger, guilt and being ashamed 'I felt ashamed'. 'Then I got angry... without guilt', she may feel responsible for what happened to the tree or ashamed because it is people just like everyone else ruining wildlife and 'the tree', 'who had felled the tree, and I felt ashamed' at the end of the poem she shows her anger, and guilt was just too much along with her other problems as she says 'I tore up the



ResultsPlus examiner comment

The candidate shows understanding of the poem's content and ideas. A personal response is evident and ideas are supported by textual references. However, these are not developed and there is some repetition. The response was awarded a mark of 16 – top of Band 4.



ResultsPlus examiner tip

To reach a Band 5, this response needs a fuller development of the argument.

Question 2

Relationships

2(a): 'Valentine' was the poem chosen for candidates' comment. Many candidates engaged with its ideas, showing understanding of the language and imagery. More confident candidates noted that the poem was an 'extended metaphor' and grasped the ideas of the complex imagery and understood how the poem explored some of the features of a relationship in an unconventional way. Less successful candidates struggled to do more than explain that an onion makes you cry and has a strong smell. One main difference between the stronger and weaker candidates was that the latter would adopt a narrative approach without going into any greater detail about the language or examples of the writer's craft. There were some responses which showed little understanding of the contents or ideas.

2(b)(i): The named poem was 'The Habit of Light'. It seemed to present a number of problems for the candidates and many chose not to approach this question. As this poem is not about a romantic relationship, many candidates found it hard to compare and link to 'Valentine'. Many candidates failed to understand that this poem was about a daughter's strong and loving relationship with her mother and interpreted the poem as being about 'someone who loves to have a clean house'.

2(b)(ii): A significant number of candidates opted for this question. Among the popular alternatives were: 'Rubbish at Adultery'; 'Sonnet 116'; 'Even Tho'; 'Nettles'. The different contexts allowed candidates to consider relationships from a variety of perspectives. The most popular choice was 'Even Tho', with stronger candidates enthusiastically discussing the imagery and tone of this poem with 'Valentine'. However, one examiner noted that it was that, whilst some candidates wrote full and perceptive personal responses, these dealt with each poem separately and did not link or compare.

This is the second half of a candidate's response for 'Valentine' Q2(a).

'Its France kiss will stay on your lips possosive
& faithful as we are for as long as we are' This
means when you eat onion or you touch onion the

(Section B continued)

Smell of the onion is still there even if you wash your
hands because its a strong smell so this is link to a
relationship because you want to be with that
person for as long as possible and love them for as
long as possible. Then it finally goes on to say 'Its
platinum loops shank to a wedding ring if you
like' meaning the shape of an onion is like a
ring when you cut them which resobels a wedding
ring. shes trying to saying we can get married if you
want. Also says 'Its scent will cling to your
fingers cling to your knife' This is again representing
the strength of the onion scent like the strength
of a relationship. ~~the~~



ResultsPlus
examiner comment

This is the second part of a response which, whilst short and underdeveloped, was generally sound in its explanation and comment. The mark it was awarded was just into Band 4, 10 marks.



ResultsPlus
examiner tip

For a Band 5 response, comments such as those on the use of language (e.g. the last two lines of the response) needed further development.

This is the opening of the candidate's response to Q2(b)(ii), focusing on the candidate's choice of poem 'Even Tho'.

(Section B continued)

(ii) 'Even tho' is the title and straight away the title tells us that she is from Jamaica with the accent. This poem is more about sex than it is about being in a relationship unlike Valentine. The author grace is describing her sex like in a more romantic and expressive way. She uses fruits to describe other things.



ResultsPlus
examiner comment

The candidate has immediately homed in on the links and comparisons of both poems. The choice of poem was a sound one, allowing the candidate to make some comparisons and links. The mark awarded was in Band 4, mark 11.



ResultsPlus
examiner tip

Try to home in on a comparative comment as soon as you can, thus giving your response a firm focus.

This is the complete response to the named poem comparing it to 'Valentine' – Q2(b)(i)

26

The Habit of light is describing Gillian's mother or some one she loves who keeps her house tidy and lives by the sea and grows their own food and is a bit dependent on them self. So in this poem it is someone who love them but not romantic love but caring love for a family member. But in Valentine it is ~~not~~ about love for nother lover so more romantic and internet. The Habit of light shows ~~it~~ this by 'she'd come through the bean rows in tattering-shoes.' So it more of a memorie than a lover. And how the writer discribes the swounding of the house. like 'to show off her brass, her polished furniture, her silver and glass.' But in Valentine it is more

(Section B continued)

love, feelings and passion. like 'It's fierce kiss will stay on your lips.' and 'I will blind you with tears like a lover.' And the poem goes on to talk later about 'wedding rings' so the writer is suggesting marriage.



ResultsPlus
examiner comment

The candidate has made some pertinent comment on the two different kinds of relationships expressed in the poems. The selection of examples, though limited, is apt. The response was awarded an overall mark of 6 in Band 2.



Make sure that points linking the two poems are fully developed, with sufficient comments on the second named poem.

Question 3

Clashes and Collisions

3(a): The named poem on this popular question was 'Half-Caste'. For many candidates this poem allowed engagement with the feelings expressed. Most candidates had a fair understanding of the poet's message in 'Half-Caste'. The stronger candidates were able to comment on the speaker's attitude, tone (the terms 'sarcastic' and 'humourous' [sic] were used) imagery and the use of dialect. The best answers were those which caught the tone of the poem and the way indignation was spiced with humour. Weaker candidates, however, did not appear to understand that it was the term itself that was the bone of contention and seemed to think that the poem was about racism in general.

3(b)(i): The chosen poem for comparison was 'Parade's End'. This was the more popular choice. The question prompted candidates to produce some insightful and thoughtful responses. There were some fruitful comparisons from the stronger candidates discussing the confrontational tone of 'Half-Caste' and the passivity of the family in 'Parade's End'. Many candidates commented and contrasted the verbal prejudice of 'Half-Caste' and the physical assaults on property in 'Parade's End'. Weaker candidates tended towards the narrative.

3(b)(ii): The most popular choice for the second poem that presented 'different strong feelings' was 'The Class Game'. This poem lent itself to a comparative analysis. The more confident candidate was able to comment and compare social and racial prejudice. The less adopted a narrative approach.

This is the second part of a candidate's response to Q3(a).

The language used ~~throughout~~ Throughout the poem is colloquial and informal again creating the effect that the writer is having a conversation with the reader. It also has an ~~aggressive~~ aggressive and argumentative tone, one example being 'but you must come back tomorrow!' This is ~~that~~ the author demanding that the reader comes back to listen to the other half of his story. Repetition is also used a lot throughout the poem, an example of this is the writer's frequency to say 'explain yourself.'

The emotion felt while reading this poem is that the writer is strongly against ~~racism~~ racism, we know this from his use of language, and imagery. The author is also strongly against the use of the word half-caste.

To conclude the writer expresses

(Section B continued)

his thoughts and ~~set~~ feeling about the use of the ~~word~~ term half-caste by his use of language and imagery.



ResultsPlus
examiner comment

This response is confident, clear and sound with clear and relevant textual references. This response was awarded the full mark of 15.



ResultsPlus

examiner tip

Note the candidate's developed comments on how the language is used to effect, with quotations to support comments and a firm conclusion to round up the argument.

This is a candidate's whole response to Q3(a).

In the Poem John Agard is his own voice and expresses his thoughts and feelings by citing various examples of half things to compare his self to for example "when Picasso mixed red and green is a half cast canvas" John is trying to get his point out to the Prejudice People of the Planet that lots of things are mixed but aren't called half cast and he doesn't think it is fair that because of his skin colour he should be called a half cast.

He also uses his colloquial language to express his feelings to the Prejudice People for example "when you say half-cast you mean Tchaikovsky sit down at dah piano and mix a ^{black} ~~white~~ key wid a white key." When he uses terms like "yu" and "dah" it shows that he is different and people shouldn't be penalised for being different and

(Section B continued)

also in the previous quote he talks about mixing a black key with a white key that relates to John in ways because one of his parents may have been white and another may have been black and what he is trying to say is it doesn't matter if you're black white or even both people are all the same and should be treated with equal respect.

John uses enjambement throughout the poem to show his confusion about why people call him half-cast when he is a mix of black and white so when the prejudice groups mock so-called half-cast people they are being hypocritical of themselves because he is a mix of the two races and has black and white in his body.

All this suggests that John disapproves of the word half-cast because he is a mix not a half that is the point he tries to express in his poem that he is a mix but a full person. his own person.



ResultsPlus
examiner comment

This response demonstrates a generally sound explanation of the writer's feelings and thoughts. However, there is a lack of depth and hence the mark awarded is top of Band 3 – that of 9.



ResultsPlus
examiner tip

To obtain a higher mark comments on the images ('Picasso' and 'Tchaikovsky') needed further depth of treatment.

This is the opening paragraph of the candidate's own choice of 'The Class Game' as the poem for comparison in Q3(b)(ii).

(Section B continued)

(B)(ii) The Class Game.

Mary Casey writes about her thoughts and feelings in this poem by saying that people should not be treat different in what class they are in, although this poem is about racism but Mary Casey and Jon Agard write about people who shouldn't be treat different if there black or white or if it is just if there poor or rich and what class they should be in. Both Jon Agard and Mary Casey write about that they both against people who think they are different than others and that also they think that every on should be treat the same and not different from others.



ResultsPlus

examiner comment

This extract fits into Band 3 with a mark of 8. There is some linkage between the two poems but there is no direct reference to text to support comments.



ResultsPlus

examiner tip

Make sure that points linking the two poems are developed and refer to the text to support your comments.

Question 4

Somewhere, Anywhere

4(a): There were very few responses for this section. 'London Snow' was the chosen text. Candidates' responses were sound and there was some interesting comment on the imagery of snow: 'Snow is used to cover up all the horrible things ... making everything look beautiful and even.'

4(b)(i): The poem selected for comparison was Blake's 'London'. The few responses available provided consistent and sound comparisons and links with insightful comments. 'The covering of the palace with blood is similar to the way snow is covering the unevenness [sic], both are covering things' is a particularly interesting example.

Question 5

Taking a Stand

5(a): 'Do not go Gentle into That Good Night' was the chosen poem. This section was a 'minority' choice.

Most candidates understood that the poem is a man's pleas to his father not to give up on life. However, few picked up on the power of the language and the despairing tone. A stanza by stanza narrative and description of the 'wise men', 'good men' was the most common approach.

5(b)(i): The stated poem for comparison was 'Solitude'. Candidates who had not fully appreciated the first poem clearly struggled to make effective comparative points. Many candidates appeared to have misunderstood the poem, considering it to be positive and uplifting, thus finding it difficult to make meaningful comparisons.

5(b)(ii): Many candidates offered 'Remember' as a comparison. This was an appropriate choice and permitted some sound comparisons, particularly in the poets' differing attitudes to death.

This is the opening page of a candidate's response to Q5(a) on 'Do not go Gentle into That Good Night'.

a) ~~We can tell in~~, 'good we can tell in the poem, 'do not go gentle into that good night', ~~was~~ written by Dylan Thomas, that it's about life and death. The poem is about not giving up, fight all you can, don't give up easily. ^{this line gets repeated a couple of times} Basically ~~talking his~~ father's 'rage against the dying of the light'. Basically, telling his father to fight ~~for~~ ^{for} your life, don't go easy.

The writer talks about 4 different people: "wise men, good men, wild men and Grave men". Wise men know they are going to die but they still don't go without a fight. Good men say goodbye to their loved ones but continue battling out to survive. The wild men they grieve because death is coming but they still don't go easily and Grave men which means Dying men, which are about to go, can be happy. He then goes on to talk about his father, where he prays for him to keep fighting death.

The language used in these poem makes it seem the person in the poem angry ~~and~~ at death. That you should never give up or death wins. you have to fight to survive or you die.



ResultsPlus

examiner comment

The opening paragraph of this response shows a generally sound grasp of the poem with a supporting comment. Although there is a tendency to paraphrase there is some explanation on how the writer conveys his thoughts. The response was placed in Band 3 with a mark of 8.



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examiner tip

Be sure to think about how to extend comments on quotations rather than paraphrasing or narrating.

This is the opening page of the response 5(b)(ii). The poem is the candidate's own choice 'Remember', linking it to the given poem.

(Section B continued)

b)
ii)

The writer of the poem, 'Remember', is Christina Rossetti and ^{will be} ^{ing it} compared to the poem, 'Do not go gentle into that good night' written by Dylan Thomas. Comparing it about life and death. ~~At the~~ The poem, 'remember' is much different than 'do not go gentle' because it's about being sad and ~~justifying~~ remembering ^{the person a} who I was, 'Remember me when I am gone away': whereas in the 'do not go gentle' it's about not giving in to death and fight to survive, 'Rage, rage against the dying of the light.'

The attitude in 'Remember' is just like you don't care. like it's saying just remember me when I'm gone but don't remember and be sad' instead be remember and ~~be~~ smile'. When in 'do not go gentle' the writer shows that this person is very angry and wants his father to fight death by giving him reasons too and giving him examples of people that would fight death, 'you, my father', 'Rage ~~to~~ Rage rage against the dying of the light.'

The attitude to life in poems are both different. in 'remember' the attitude is just dull, saying ^{Forget} remember me and be happy, 'better by far you should forget and smile, than that you should remember and be sad.' whereas in 'do not go gentle' the attitude to life is good because it's about not giving in to death, so I stay alive.



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examiner comment

The candidate has chosen an appropriate second poem. In this extract the candidate considers the poets' attitude to death, but the ideas are not fully developed. The response overall scored 8/15, mid Band 3, as more detail was required.



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If candidates opt for a (b)(ii) answer, they must choose a poem carefully and refer to it in sufficient depth, as well as making links with the first named poem.

Paper summary

Overall, the response to the poems showed understanding and engagement with both sections of the paper. However, based on their performance on this paper, candidates should:

- include more detail and development in their answers
- make full use of examples, not just listing them or language features
- keep separate and clearly label the two parts of the Section B answers – (a) on one named poem; (b)(i) on a second named poem or (b)(ii) on a second poem of their choice
- remember to write their responses for Section B on their chosen Anthology collection (some candidates attempted answers on two or three collections)
- think carefully about how to make effective links and comparisons, addressing both poems (although equal weighting is not required)
- write their answers in the correct part of the answer booklet.

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