

Examiners' Report January 2013

GCSE English Literature 5ET2H 01

Understanding Poetry

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Introduction

In this series, there were a number of responses where candidates showed a very positive appreciation and analysis of poetry. This was particularly evident in the Unseen Poem, where examiners professed themselves pleased with the quality of response. There were also many good responses to the Anthology poems and, on both the (a) questions on the named poem and the (b) questions that looked for comparative points across two poems, some very thoughtful candidates revealed careful preparation of their chosen collection. On the (b) questions, there were some excellent comparisons, but a minority of weaker candidates struggled to compare the poems effectively. Rather than occasional links, comparisons throughout would have greatly improved their answers as many candidates had a thorough understanding of each. Centres might like to consider ways of helping candidates find and comment on similarities and differences between two poems, especially in their handling of similar thematic material. For example, in Q3 candidates were invited to look at the different forms of prejudice – verbal prejudice and physical damage to property and the writers' attitudes to these.

Centres have taken heed of the advice which stressed the need for candidates to answer one whole question from Section B, with a separate part (a) on the given poem and the comparative part, (b)(i) or (b)(ii) – either a second stated poem or one of their own choice from the relevant collection. It was pleasing to note that many candidates had written in greater detail this series. However, it remains essential for candidates to label their responses clearly, so that examiners can see exactly where one part of the question ends and another begins.

Question 1

Unseen poem

The poem selected for 5ET2H was 'My Grandmother' by Elizabeth Jennings, a poem which presents a granddaughter's view on her difficult relationship with her grandmother. Most candidates showed clear engagement and understanding. One examiner noted that this question proved to be a good discriminator, with sufficient narrative element to allow less able candidates to do a 'workmanlike job of summarising content and ideas'.

The more able candidates picked up on the regretful tone, the sense of guilt as well as the, possibly self-imposed, isolation of the grandmother from her family. Most candidates focused on the problematic relationship between the poet and the grandmother. There were many pertinent comments on 'my grandmother kept an antique shop – or it kept her', with many commenting on the significance of the caesura. Some candidates picked up on the image of the long narrow room and the dust linking both to the grandmother's death. A few struggled with why the poet 'was afraid' to go out with the grandmother, but many acknowledged that that was where the poet's feelings of guilt originated.

In a number of candidates' responses, the thoughts and feelings expressed in the poem became somewhat lost in the emphasis given to the poetic devices used. An excessive focus on the use of particular parts of speech and the rhyme pattern meant that sometimes the candidates failed to make convincing connections between these points and the presentation of the writer's ideas. Indeed, this was something which differentiated the more successful from the less successful responses. Higher band responses combined analysis with a sense of overview, whereas weaker candidates pointed out features without developing comment on how these served the content and ideas.

One examiner noted that candidates in general are increasingly using embedded quotations and far more sophisticated vocabulary, suggesting good teaching practice by centres.

These are the opening three paragraphs of a candidate's response to the Unseen Poem (Q1).

SECTION A: UNSEEN POEM

You must answer Question 1 in the space below.

In the poem "My Grandmother" the poet - Elizabeth Jennings uses a variety of techniques to present her sad and guilty thoughts and feelings about her grandmother to the reader.

In "My Grandmother", Jennings uses repetition in order to convey her guilt about what she once said to her grandmother.

For instance, she writes "I still could feel the guilt" in the fifth line of the second stanza, and the word "guilt" is then repeated in the second line of the fourth stanza, with Jennings writing "Only the guilt of what I once refused".

The repetition of the word "guilt" suggests to the reader that Jennings' feelings about refusing to go out with her grandmother, were never ending, and that nothing stopped her from feeling bad about what she did. It also allows the poet to link the end stanza of the poem back to the beginning, and by doing so implies that she feels like her refusal ultimately led to her grandmother's unhappiness and death.



ResultsPlus

examiner comment

This is an assured response with some sophisticated touches. There is a degree of empathy when focusing on the relationship. The response merited a low Band 5 mark of 17.



ResultsPlus

examiner tip

Note how the focus on language is precise and commented on with perception.

These are the two final paragraphs of a candidate's response to the Unseen Poem.

The tone at the start of the poem is fragile. She says "And I remember how I once refused to go out with her, since I was afraid". This gives the idea that she didn't know her grandmother very well and rarely saw her. She then says "Though she never said that she was hurt, I still could feel the guilt of that refusal". This gives the idea of the grandmother being fragile. The tone changes to a saddened tone when she writes "Later, too frail to keep a shop". It becomes saddened because the grandmother is getting older and is not able to keep her beloved shop anymore.

(Section A continued)

The story of the poem is emotional, but mysterious. This is because we never really find out what the grandmother was like. It is emotional because it gives the feel of the grandmother being lonely and fragile. The emotion changes in the last stanza when she says "and when she died I felt no grief at all". She doesn't feel any grief because she hardly knew her. She then says "Only the ~~guilt~~ guilt of what I once refused". This makes us think that taking her granddaughter out could have meant a lot to the grandmother and she didn't even get to do that. The poem finishes with the line "Only the new dust falling through the air". This leaves the poem on a sad note and gives the feel of the grandmother fading away.



ResultsPlus
examiner comment

Throughout the response the candidate has displayed an understanding of the content and ideas expressed in the poem. A more focused and organised approach would have earned the response a higher mark. The overall mark given was Band 4 mark of 13.



Candidates should stay focused on the task and on specific language features.

Question 2

Relationships

2(a): 'Valentine' was the poem selected for the candidates' comment. Many candidates engaged well with its ideas, showing understanding of the language and imagery, explaining for example the importance of the extended metaphor. However, the difference between the weaker and stronger candidates was that the weaker ones tended to summarise content and 'feature spot' without going into any detail about the connotations of the language. Stronger candidates showed considerable understanding and appreciation of Duffy's witty, unconventional ideas, as well as commenting on the writer's sense of realism. Examiners noted how quotations such as 'It is a moon wrapped in brown [sic] paper' and 'Its platinum loops shrink to a wedding ring' proved to be very popular and were explored across the band range.

2(b)(i): The named poem for comparison was 'The Habit of Light'. This did not prove to be a popular option. Many candidates who chose this question appeared to struggle, not fully understanding the nature of the relationship – that between a mother and daughter. Less able candidates wrote about a woman who was in love with her home and possessions and failed to make a connection to the love felt for her family which was shown through her dedication to create a beautiful home. Stronger candidates did pick up on the reference to light in both poems.

2(b)(ii): This question proved a far more popular option and the candidates' choices were varied and appropriate. The most popular choice was 'Even Tho'. Candidates who chose this poem appeared to do well. More confident candidates made links to the desire for a permanent relationship and the idea of pain caused by a relationship with Nichols' sexual innuendos and the overriding idea of fun. Other choices included 'Kissing', 'Nettles', 'Sonnet 116'.

These are first two paragraphs of a response to the chosen poem 'Valentine', Q2(a).

Valentine an unconventional poem about love written by Carol Ann Duffy uses an extended metaphor throughout the poem to convey the message of love. Valentine is very unconventional because the poet does not use an object that we would regularly associate with love, "Not a red rose or a satin heart." normally when you think about love you think of these beautiful delicate things to go along with it "satin" a soft silk used to describe a heart which is very special and delicate. However instead the poet uses a normal mundane object to express love "I give you an onion". This will make the reader almost pause and think twice because an onion could never ~~be~~ present love, it is not delicate or soft just a normal food instrument.

Moreover the reason why the poet decides to choose this is because when you unravel this object it turns into a very beautiful thing, "it is a moon wrapped in brown paper". she is saying you must look beneath the skin and just like people once you unravel that skin or "brown paper" that is when you find the true beauty do not just reject people because you do not like what you see at



ResultsPlus
examiner comment

This is a perceptive explanation of how the writer uses attitudes and feelings to create effect. There is an interesting insight into the nature of the relationship. The response was awarded a mark of 13 in Band 5.



Note how the candidate comments on the imagery and is confident about using the term 'extended metaphor'.

This is the second part and conclusion of the candidate's response on Q2(a).

However in the second stanza Carol writes 'It will blind you with tears like a lover' Carol is trying to show how love will not always be happiness and there will be sorrow along the way & she uses an onion as her way of ^{implying} saying this. Carol writes the sentence 'Like a lover.' underneath the first as written with a full stop, this makes the flow of the poem ~~stop~~ blunt and also gives the reader the feeling of that it is normal for a lover to go through sorrow.

As we go down the poem she says 'it's fierce kiss will stay on your lips' this is done to show how the taste of the onion does not leave a person without the taste still in their mouth or lips the same way neither will her love. This relates to the sentence on the second last line of the bottom stanza as Carol writes 'it's scent will cling to your fingers' Carol is trying to show how the scent of the onion

(Section B continued)

Is referring to her ~~love~~ love, ~~the~~ and the ~~ring~~ ring
clinging to the fingers is referring to how it would be
stuck on your ~~and~~ mind, therefore showing as heard
as you may try to remove the scent, the scent will
still be clinged onto your fingers, the same way the
love will always be stuck on their ~~o~~ minds.

In conclusion the onion is metaphorically used
~~as a certain phase in a net~~ to describe a
phase they are or may go through.



ResultsPlus

examiner comment

The candidate is focused on the writer's craft and how it is used to effect. There is clear and relevant reference which places the response towards the top of Band 2, mark of 6.



ResultsPlus

examiner tip

Note how the candidate has worked methodically through the poem.

This is a short, but complete response to Q2(b)(ii).

b (ii)

The poem 'Even Tho' written by Grace Nichols displays the very physical love felt by two people towards each other and it is a poem on not how two peoples emotions can bring each other together but how bodies can do the same thing and this is what makes it different from the poem "Valentine" by Carol Ann Duffy.

The Poems are both written in free verse and this is what makes the poems similar because they have done this to express love, it is not something you can control and form it comes naturally bending and working its way into something. On the other hand another similarity in both poems is that they both use a food item as a metaphor. Valentine uses an extended to represent ongoing love

(Section B continued)

and support her point of love being felt deep inside someone rather than just on the surface you have to be patient whereas "Even tho" uses it to describe physical pleasures "you be banana, I be avocado" when you open up an avocado you find a hole in which the Banana is able to enter so it is very physical and this is where the two poets ideas clash. It makes the reader feel that love can be interpreted in different ways you just have to understand each other

The poem "Even tho" has many command words and pleades "Come" which is repeated to show the desperation of the poet for the love of the lover and this makes the reader feel that even though she does not want to be consumed by love for someone she needs it still. In contrast to Valerie this is the same message left by the poet "take it" "Here" all pleading command words which will make the reader feel that love can really take over a person all together and that between physical love and Emotional there has to be a balance otherwise love cannot grow and you cannot get over heartbreak or it can be too much.



ResultsPlus

examiner comment

The candidate has produced an insightful response looking at how the two different kinds of love are expressed. However, this is rather a short and undeveloped response. The mark awarded was 11 in Band 4.



ResultsPlus

examiner tip

Note how the candidate constantly makes links and comparisons between the two poems.

Question 3

Clashes and collisions

3(a): 'Half-Caste' was the named poem for comment. This was a very popular question and one which attracted a wide range of responses. One examiner noted that the candidates 'wrote with relish' about the poem's humour, mocking energy and sarcastic language. One candidate mentioned that this is a poem which needs to be read out loud to get the full effect! Many candidates displayed a strong personal engagement with the poem. Stronger candidates analysed the examples and imagery used by Agard – 'england weather' 'picasso' and 'tschaikovsky' [sic]. Less confident candidates appeared not to understand that it was the term 'half-caste' that the poet had issues with and treated the poem as a 'rant' (a common word used to describe the tone) against racial prejudice in general.

3(b)(i): The named poem for comparison was 'Parade's End'. This proved to be a popular choice. Most candidates noted that Agard makes a stand, whereas Nagra does not. Stronger candidates made a good job of developing similarities as well as differences between the two texts. There was close attention to detail, including reference to colour. Many candidates also looked at the use of dialect. Weaker candidates tended towards the narrative approach, to which 'Parade's End' lent itself, often struggling to find closer links with 'Half-Caste'.

3(b)(ii): With the candidates' own choice of poem, most popular proved to be 'The Class Game'. Most candidates were able to write about the racial and social prejudice. Other appropriate options included 'Your Dad did What?', 'Belfast Confetti' and 'Our Sharpville', all looking at the strong feelings expressed in the poems.

This is the middle section of a candidate's response to Q3(a).

John Agard uses repetition throughout the poem; 'Explain yourself what you mean'. The writer John Agard has now switched ~~to~~ to his colloquial native language. He is asking the prejudice speaker to explain himself on why he has the ~~in~~ right to insult a man he does not know. John Agard repeats this ~~quote~~ quote throughout the play to show the prejudice speaker

(Section B continued)

does not have a reason for his offensive actions.

John Agard uses puns and imagery to show his ideas of what he sees as half caste; 'you mean when picasso mix red an green is a half-caste canvas'. This shows John Agard ~~poet~~ clear views on how he sees half-caste to be a very ~~split~~ separate and not seen as one.

John Agard extends his idea of him being seen as half a person; 'I half-cast human being caste half-a-shadow'. This ~~imagery of half a shadow~~ is what shows us that John Agard feels he makes less of an impact on the world because of his race, he feels that people take less notice of him, as he and castes only half a shadow on the world.



ResultsPlus
examiner comment

There is a sound awareness of the satirical tone of the poem. Comments are supported by appropriate textual references. The response was placed in Band 3 with a mark of 8.



ResultsPlus
examiner tip

When referring to language features, such as 'puns' or 'colloquial language', do not just list the feature, but show clearly the effect on the ideas in the poem.

This is the opening section of a response to Q3(a).

(a) John Agard ~~for~~ uses rhythm and satire to present his views against prejudice and racism. The poem begins with a statement 'Excuse me' creating an angry tone that will later ^{present} reveal ~~itself~~ ^{his} ~~become~~ passion regarding the subject. The poet uses structure to carefully ~~and~~ guide his words ~~to~~ to have the largest impact. For example the line 'Explain yourself' is repeated constantly throughout the poem to create a rhythm that helps assist in the reading but also draws specific attention to that line which is noticeably the key message from the poem. Additionally John Agard uses specific spelling as ~~the~~ key phrases and words

(Section B continued)

Such as 'yourself' to allow the reader to imagine his dialect speaking the poem this is ~~an~~ just one of many ways for the poet used poetic devices to display his own personal opinion regarding his feelings of prejudice in 'half-caste'.



ResultsPlus

examiner comment

This is an assured response. There is reference to the satirical and aggressive tone of the poem. The response was awarded a mark of 10 in Band 4.



ResultsPlus

examiner tip

Note how the candidate 'launches' straight into the analysis, giving as strong an interpretation as possible.

This is the final section of a comparative response to Q3(b)(i), using the given poem of 'Parade's End'.

To do this Parades End uses Socio-historic context in the form of the Yorkshire dialect on line 13 to allow the ~~to~~ reader to ^{become immersed within} ~~create~~ ^{imagary} ~~white feelings~~ while reading the poem allowing the reader to become engaged and ~~regard~~ be more susceptible regarding ~~Dr~~ Daljit Nagra's views on prejudice.

While John Agard uses satire to show ~~his~~ his views regarding prejudice ~~Dr~~ Daljit Nagra uses emotive language and examples of prejudice to allow the reader to understand her views against racism and

(Section B continued)

~~how~~ often it's used. An example can be found where Daljit Nagra uses the derogatory term 'donkeys' to show how ~~injustice~~ Council Mums who don't work will abuse this family disregarding the fact they work or pay for their benefits. This emotive and shocking choice helps portray the current discrimination that everyday people face hopelessly bringing modern day discrimination into context showing the reader that there is a problem.

John Agard however ~~st~~ uses his dialog 'An listening to you wiel de keen half of mi ear' to show his disgust at the prejudice that remains in today's society and how if no improvements were made ~~they~~ ^{why should} he ~~would~~ simply he listen??



ResultsPlus
examiner comment

This is a confident and detailed response, with the candidate making assured comparisons and links. This response was placed in the top of Band 4 with 12 marks.



Note how the candidate homes in on the use of dialects for effect, linking and comparing the two.

Question 4

Somewhere, anywhere

4(a): The set poem was 'London Snow'. There were very few responses for this section. The candidates who approached this question appeared to have done so with some success. There was a sound understanding of the writer's craft and a range of relevant examples used.

4(b)(i): Blake's 'London' was the named poem for comparison. Examiners noted a range of good comparisons and there was a high number of Band 4/5 responses.

This is the middle section of a candidate's response to Question 4(a).

In the second line, 'In large white places falling on the city brown; the clever use of colours to describe the contrast between the snow and London shows that, white representing purity and cleanliness,

(Section B continued)

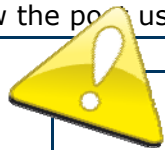
falls upon the brown city, brown representing dirt and pollution. This imagery implies that despite the uncontrollability of snow, it brings a calm to the usually hectic city. This also is ironic, and is backed up by line four, which says 'Hushing the latest traffic,' which shows the snow has an instant effect on a stereotypical city.

The use of 'the rule of three' in line five, 'Deaden, muffling, stippling,' shows another effect of the snow, and is implying that the business and noise of London town is drowned out by the snow.



ResultsPlus
examiner comment

This is an insightful and assured response. There is a sound awareness of how the poet uses imagery and language to effect.



ResultsPlus

examiner tip

Note how the candidate focuses on some of the features of the poem and explains their effect.

Question 5

Taking a Stand

5(a): The poem 'Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night' was chosen for candidates' comments. The poem seems to have been understood. Weaker candidates focused on 'anger' as a catch-all description of the mood and adopted a narrative approach. Stronger candidates acknowledged the poet's desperation for his dying father to fight. There were some comments by more confident candidates on the importance of the formal structure and repetition in the poem.

5(b)(i): The text chosen for comparison was 'Solitude'. Most candidates managed some kind of comparison in the sense of grasping the difference in attitude to death. Stronger candidates commented on their poets' attitudes to life **and** death.

5(b)(ii): The most popular choice was 'Remember'. This proved to be an appropriate choice as there was a wide scope for comparison and linkage. There were some sound responses to the tone and mood of the set poem and that of the candidates' choice. Stronger candidates noted that neither poet uses the term 'Death' and compared the imagery used by both to convey the concept of death.

These are the two opening paragraphs of a candidate's response to Q5(a).

The writer presents his attitudes to life and death in 'Do not go gentle into that good night' as something you should rage against. Thomas writes this poem to his father telling him 'not to go gentle' ~~into~~ as his father was nearly dying at this time and so he believed people shouldn't give up so easily. He also had a fear of death at a young age when told he would die before the age of 40. Which also made him write the poem, telling himself to rage against death.

Dylan Thomas writes in the form of a villanelle which is a restricted poem of 19 lines and 10 syllables in each line. This foreshadows how his relationship was like with his father. Thomas's father was very strict and did not really let him do anything. The poem uses repetition such as "Do not go gentle into that good night" and "Rage ~~in~~ rage against the dying of the light", as a reminder to him self that you

(Section B continued)

shouldn't give in too easy into death. ¶



ResultsPlus
examiner comment

This is a thoughtful response with a sound awareness of how the poet conveys his thoughts. There is some personal comment as to the structure of the poem. The response was placed in Band 3 with a mark of 9.



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Make sure that a personal interpretation is always clearly supported: the comments on the poem's structure in this response need more analysis and thought.

These are two paragraphs from the middle section of a candidate's response to Q5(b)(i).

(11) Both writers in "solitude" and "do not go gentle into that good night" both ~~use~~ talk about how if you should be happy ~~otherwise~~ about life and we shouldn't weep and sob about dying but enjoy what time you have left.

Solitude talks about how if you are happy everyone would want to come to you however if you are sad you will be alone, she does this through the use of contrasts for example "Fast, Fast" "sing, sigh". This indicates to the reader that in order to be popular and have everyone like you, you need to be happy. Wilcox believe in positive thinking, in which if your positive you will have things come your way. In the same way Thomas believed in enjoying life however he does this by using repetition ~~to show~~ ~~at us~~ telling us to rage against death.

(Section B continued)

similarly he believed in positive thinking ~~not~~ ~~to~~ and not giving up. "old age should burn and rave at close of days". He believes just because your old doesn't mean it is your time to end.

Wilcox mentions ~~if you~~ "be sad and lose them all" ~~& suggesting~~ indicating you won't find happiness with be sad. Now one wants to be around someone who is sad as everyone has problems of their own, in which they don't need reminding of. Thomas mentions that ~~men who are wise~~ "wise men at their end know death is right, because their words had forked no lightning they do not go gentle into that good night". Thomas believes that these men are wise because they know their words haven't made an impact on the world and so they fight for their life as they want to make a difference. Thus the reader the impression that fighting for your life is a wise thing to do because this ~~is~~ ~~the~~ ~~the~~ ^{means} you actually are well end up feeling happy that you achieved something great.

Both writers believe that you make the choice



ResultsPlus

examiner comment

This is quite a sound response with an awareness of the different ways the writers express their views and yet links have been found. The response was awarded a mark of 6 in Band 2.



ResultsPlus

examiner tip

The candidate refers to both poems and poets throughout the response, not treating them separately.

Paper summary

Examiners commented on candidates' positive response to the poems, especially the Unseen Poem. Based on their performance on this paper, candidates are advised to:

- make sure that particular requirements of the question are focused on
- use their examples fully, analysing and commenting on them
- make effective links and comparisons
- keep separate and clearly label the two parts of Section B
- answer in the correct section of the paper.

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