

GCSE

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English Literature (1213)

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Examiners' Report

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Introduction

This is now a well-established and stable specification. The number of entries continues to grow steadily year-on-year, and several centres entered candidates for the first time this year. The balance of entries between Foundation and Higher tiers is in line with previous years.

The 'clean texts' format is now very well understood by centres, and it was clear from the level of textual knowledge that a great deal of thorough teaching, and learning, had taken place. Once again the ability to recall and select detailed examples from texts was impressive, and this was seen often.

There was little shift in the units favoured for coursework, and the familiar set texts appeared as frequently as ever in the choices for the examination paper. The take-up for Section D on the examination paper remains small, although those centres that have chosen one of the Modern Literary Non-Fiction texts seem to have found them interesting and worthwhile.

The marking of the examination, now entirely online, went very smoothly.

Coursework

Centres continue to present a wide and enterprising range of assignments, and it is clear to the moderators that the great majority of candidates are very well served by the opportunities which they have been offered. In a few centres the tendency to support weaker candidates (by 'scaffolding' or in other ways) was noticed, as an increasing factor in centres' own assessments. Obviously the work of the moderator is made much more straightforward if the nature and degree of support is identified, perhaps in the 'comments' space on the front sheet. In the majority of cases such support is taken into account, and almost all centres assess their candidates realistically.

The administrative procedures for this specification now seem to be well understood, in the great majority of cases. For 2007 there should be an opportunity for candidates to authenticate their work by signing the front sheet. In a few cases, the requirement to send to the moderator the highest and lowest marked folders, if these are not included in the selected sample, was overlooked.

Coursework Units

Unit 1: Pre-1914 Drama

As the great majority of centres make this a 'cross-over' piece of coursework with GCSE English, one would not expect to see a range of playwrights. Nor is there a great range of plays: *Macbeth* continues to be the most popular, with *Romeo and Juliet* also widely chosen. The quality of the work offered for this unit continues to be quite high, and most centres have developed their own tried and tested assignments. The two sets of Assessment Objectives, covering both 1213 and 1203/1204, are almost always met successfully in the single piece of work.

Unit 2: Pre-1914 Prose

There is probably a wider range of assignments offered for this unit than for the other two. Short stories continue to be a popular choice, and centres all now seem to be aware that a minimum of two stories must be covered. In the case of some more modest candidates, little is offered beyond a narrative account of the stories, but there is genuine engagement, and textual analysis, at the top end.

Of the 'full-length' texts, *Pride and Prejudice* is by far the most popular, and interest has not doubt been stimulated by the various television and film versions which have appeared relatively recently. There is also some enthusiasm for Hardy (usually *Tess*), Dickens, and *Silas Marner* was once again represented. There are, of course, suggestions for suitable tasks and assignments for this, as well as for the other units, in the Specification Guide.

Unit 3: Pre-1914 Poetry

This is the unit where almost all centres meet the requirement for comparative work (although in many cases centres also make comparison the focus of the work on short stories, for example) and a wide range of poetry collections continues to be offered. The assignments suggested in the teachers' guide are popular, with the 'love and loss' unit, still often based on the poems in the previous Edexcel Poetry Anthology, remaining a favourite. However, some of the less ambitious poetry work was not particularly impressive: there were units which offered little beyond a narrative account, or at best a paraphrase, of the poems, without much in the way of developed comment. In some cases, over-long quotations were offered, without supporting analysis - and in coursework the ability to quote at length is of no particular value unless the quotation is used to illustrate the candidate's own comments and responses. Overall, there were probably more candidates for whom Poetry was their weakest unit than there were for Drama or Prose.

Written papers

Once again the examiners saw much work of a high quality. The 'clean texts' format is no longer a novelty, and the benefits of this system continue to be seen: few candidates now seem to miss the marginal notes and prompts on which so many of them placed (over)reliance in the past. Of course there is still some unsupported and underdeveloped 'feature-spotting', particularly in the poetry answers, but examiners are no longer seeing the long, often pointless, lists of features which appeared in some responses in the years up to 2004 when annotation was permitted.

Nor does 'clean texts' seem to have reduced the level of close reference, where this is used in a purposeful way, to illustrate and support candidates' responses. In fact the overall level of textual knowledge seems, if anything, to be higher than in some previous years, and good candidates seem to have little difficulty in choosing appropriate details (which may or may not be in the form of quotation) to substantiate their comments.

The choice of texts is virtually unchanged from last year. In the Poetry section Collections A and B are more popular than 'Nature', and in the Drama and Prose sections the 'old favourites' remain the same. Presumably there is a whole generation of young adults familiar with the sad demise of Candy's dog, or the tragic plight of Curley's wife. The Literary Non-fiction section has yet to 'take off', in terms of widespread interest.

What distinguishes the successful answer from the less successful remains very much the same as in past years: answers which focus closely and consistently on the question, using detailed reference to texts to support the ideas, do well; answers which follow a simple 'narrative' approach in Drama and Prose, or which simply paraphrase the poems in the Poetry section, do much less well.

Paper 2F - Foundation Tier

Section A: Modern Poetry

'In Such a Time as This' and 'Identity' were more or less equally popular, while 'Nature' was chosen much less frequently. In all questions the requirements to offer comparison was made explicit, and the great majority of candidates responded to this.

In English Literature the bullet points suggest areas which might be considered, rather than forming part of the question itself. In general they are used sensibly, often forming the basis for an essay structure.

F1. This proved slightly the more popular choice of the two questions on this collection. Generally 'Wherever I Hang' seemed better understood, and weaker candidates often wrote unbalanced answers if they struggled with 'Where the Scattering Began'.

F2. Some unlikely choices - "The Send-off" - but generally this question was well done. A few examiners reported that comparison was not well done, being offered only as an afterthought.

F3. The Heaney poem proved accessible ("very well taught" thought one examiner), though interpretations of 'The Road Not Taken' were sometimes very literal.

F4. This question was generally not quite as well done as F3. Weaker candidates struggled with the humour in 'Not My Best Side'; and the choices for a second poem were not always wisely made.

F5. Very few responses.

F6. 'Thistles' was the most popular coupling here. At times the final bullet point - "particular words and phrases" - leads to a mere list of phrases, with little worthwhile comment on them.

Section B: Modern Prose

As ever, focus on the question, and knowledge of the text in support of the views expressed, characterises the best answers.

F7. Almost 80% of candidates wrote on *Of Mice and Men*. This was the more popular question, generally done quite well. In many cases her "importance" was measured solely in terms of her part in the narrative, but some better responses moved far beyond this, commenting on her role in the structure, and developing the themes.

F8. Candidates who opted for this question generally did well. A range of characters, other than George and Lennie, appeared; as the central concept of the question elicited many interesting and well illustrated responses.

F9. Relatively few candidates offer this text at foundation tier, though the take-up is much greater (24%) at Higher Tier. In both F9 and F10 candidates showed a strong focus on the question, and on the text.

F10. See above.

F11. Very few responses (1%).

F12. Very few responses (1%).

F13. This was the more popular choice on this text, though few candidates wrote on this book in total. Sensible choices for leadership were offered, with supporting textual reference. Perhaps surprisingly, Piggy was quite widely nominated.

F14. Very few responses.

F15. Very few responses (1%).

F16. Very few responses (1%).

F17. Very few responses (1%).

F18. Very few responses (1%).

Section C: Modern Drama

F19. This is by far the most popular text in this section (45%), though it does not have the same dominance as does *Of Mice and Men* in the prose section. F19 produced some very good answers, though amongst some weaker responses it was clear that “beliefs” had not been fully grasped.

F20. This very straightforward question was generally well done. Some responses offered little more than a narrative account of events, but more thoughtful candidates gave due attention to the “how” element in the question.

F21. Of the two questions on this text, F22 seemed rather more successful: good use was made of the bullet points, particularly. F21 responses were, at times, less well focused. Some examiners also felt that F21 brought out a higher proportion of ‘prepared’ answers which did not really fit this question.

F22. See above.

F23. This is another popular text in this section, second only to *An Inspector Calls*. F23 was rather less well done than F24 – perhaps because many candidates were content to write only on Beatrice’s character, without doing justice to her “role”, as the question requires.

F24. This question gave candidates an opportunity to engage with themes and characters, and was generally well done. It was clear from many of the responses that issues in the play had been thoroughly aired in preparation for the exam, and candidates responded to this question confidently.

F25. Very few responses (1%).

F26. Very few responses (1%).

F27. This question proved inviting to a wide range of candidates, and it was generally done well. Opinions were often illustrated with quite well-chosen and detailed textual references.

F28. Very few responses - F27 was by far the more popular.

F29. There was an interesting range of responses to this question, though some examiners felt that a disproportionate prominence was given to the first bullet point - it seemed as though candidates were determined to write about Bamforth, almost regardless of the question.

F30. Very few responses - F29 was far more popular.

Section D: Literary Non-Fiction

F31. There were some responses to this question, and it was clear from their general tenor that the text had been widely enjoyed. Both F31 and F32 were answered well, demonstrating engagement with the text, and a clear understanding of the social background to Frank's experiences.

F32. See above.

F33. Very few responses (fewer than 1%).

F34. Very few responses (fewer than 1%).

F35. Very few responses (fewer than 1%).

F36. Very few responses (fewer than 1%).

F37. Very few responses.

F38. A small number of candidates attempted this question, with some success: the better answers focused on the writer's presentation, rather than simply on the characteristics of the father and stepmother.

F39. Very few responses.

F40. Very few responses.

F41. Very few responses.

F42. Very few responses.

Paper 3H - Higher Tier

Section A: Modern Poetry

The need for comparison was recognized by the great majority of candidates, and a large number of well-balanced, controlled responses characterized this section. Collections A and B far outweigh Collection C in popularity, as at Foundation Tier. Most poems seemed to be very well understood; and comments on writers' technique were often perceptive and convincingly illustrated. 'Feature-spotting', for its own sake, continues to decline.

H1. 'Half-past Two' was almost invariably well covered, while 'Yellow' presented more of a challenge for some candidates, perhaps proving to be the discriminator for higher grades.

H2. The only really widely chosen poems for comparison were 'The Send-off' and 'Death in Leamington', perhaps predictably. The candidates who chose to write on two Wilfred Owen poems often developed their ideas and comments in a very convincing way; and 'Death in Leamington' also allowed for some worthwhile comparisons.

H3. One examiner wrote:

"Few respondees bothered to challenge either 'Mirror' or 'Warning' as titles. Many saw the poems as celebration or the opposite of reaching a certain age. Meanings were clearly identified and paraded, and there was no shortage of comment of a technical nature. All in all, a successful bit of questioning."

H4. Some of the choices for comparison did not work particularly well, here. Very few candidates take up the option of writing about more than one 'other' poem, as this question allowed. There were strong responses, however: one examiner found that "the vigorous confidence and self-assertion of 'Still I Rise' was often tellingly juxtaposed with the self-doubt and regret of 'Once Upon a Time'."

H5. A few responses, though too few on which to base a generalized comment.

H6. Choices for comparison here included 'The Horses', 'A Blade of Grass' and 'Nettles' and each of these worked well. There were some sophisticated and well-expressed comments on 'The Thought-Fox'.

Section B: Modern Prose

H7. At Higher Tier, about 65% of entrants choose *Of Mice and Men*, in this section. Question 7 was the more popular of the two, though Question 8 was also well represented. Of Question 7 one examiner wrote:

"All the major characters were commented upon and their several stories told. The more successful went for detailed analysis of key scenes and what they revealed of character and socio-economic truths."

H8. Although there were slightly fewer responses to this question, the standard was, if anything, slightly higher. Perhaps the more abstract concept in the question

appealed to particularly thoughtful candidates, rather than to those who sought a more direct, character-based question. In practice, of course, Question 8 was character-based, with much discussion of Slim, Curley and others, as well as of George and Lennie.

H9. "Boo and Mrs. Dubose were favourites here, while some candidates wrote rather less successfully on Dolphus Raymond", commented one examiner.

H10. This question brought out the range of ability clearly, and indeed both questions on this text, chosen by approximately 25% of Higher Tier entrants, gave the most able candidates plenty of scope to show their depth of understanding and detailed knowledge. One examiner noted that this question "encouraged candidates of all abilities to consider the narrative complexity of the novel".

H11. On both these questions, one examiner commented, "when writing about *Animal Farm*, some candidates fall into the trap of retelling the story in lots of detail and losing sight of the question. It is worth remembering that the examiner knows what happens in the novel and that it is not necessary to explain narrative detail at length."

H12. See above.

H13. This text is chosen by approximately 12% of candidates at Higher Tier. Although H13 proved slightly less popular than the more specific H14, it produced some very good answers.

H14. One examiner wrote, of H13 and H14: "often the best answers on the paper, especially Q14 on Simon which allowed for development of symbolism etc in the best answers."

H15. Fewer than 1% of candidates wrote on this text.

H16. Fewer than 1% of candidates wrote on this text.

H17. Fewer than 1% of candidates wrote on this text.

H18. Fewer than 1% of candidates wrote on this text.

Section C: Modern Drama

The concentration on a single text is not as marked as at Foundation Tier, nor as in the Prose section. The take-up of the popular plays was, approximately:

<i>An Inspector Calls</i>	43%
<i>A View from the Bridge</i>	30%
<i>Educating Rita</i>	18%
<i>Journey's End</i>	8%

H19. This proved a popular question, and its very specific nature led to responses which were almost invariably well-focused. Sheila's later development was generally well appreciated, although one examiner felt that "candidates showed little sophisticated thinking about her early appearances".

H20. Popular, and generally well done, although the “moral lecture”, reasonably enough, tended to dominate most responses, with relatively little on the ‘ghost’ and ‘murder’ aspects. This play continues to hold its appeal for each generation of candidates, and their positive experience in studying the text is clearly reflected in many answers.

H21. This produced some interesting choices of conclusion, sometimes in conflict with opening sentences. Candidates were able to distinguish clearly enough between the two parts of the social and cultural divide to enable some sort of discussion to progress. Some, though, lacked a sufficiently flexible vocabulary to enable them to expand on their own ideas.

H22. This straightforward question produced a lot of capable and balanced answers.

H23. One examiner commented:

“Questions 23/24: Again, I was impressed with the awareness of theatrical / dramatic technique in many answers. Poorer responses tended to focus on narrative detail, and some answers to question 24 focused on Act One, even though the question is about Act Two.”

Another examiner had a different experience, however:

“Q23 & Q24 disappointing overall - no problems with questions but often limited answers which did not allow candidates to show range of understanding. Q24 often failed to sustain the answer due to taking very narrow view of question and providing limited narrative account of end of play.”

H24. See above.

H25. Too few scripts on which to base a generalized comment.

H26. Too few scripts on which to base a generalized comment.

H27. Most responses homed in on the absurdity and pointlessness of the conflict, while some candidates acknowledged the camaraderie, or even the humour, in the play.

H28. This question, like H27, produced some very strong responses. One examiner’s experience was:

“well answered. Most saw his role as ‘explicateur’ and his acting as a contrast to the more hardened officers. His death was usually described with some sensitivity.”

H29. Attempted by very few candidates (2%).

H30. Attempted by very few candidates, though those who wrote on H30 clearly saw the issue raised in the question as being at the heart of the play, and there were some thoughtful and well-focused responses.

Section D: Modern Literary Non-Fiction

Only Questions 31 and 32, and 37 and 38 were attempted in significant numbers, in this section.

H31. This question produced a range of material, most of it chosen appropriately. Those candidates who did choose to write on this text seem to have engaged with it in a constructive way.

H32. 'Hope' was often represented in the trip to America, and most candidates did find evidence that the book had positive elements, in the terms of the question.

H37. This was a very direct question, and gave candidates plenty of scope to show their understanding of the writer's technique. Better responses grasped this opportunity, while others were content to offer little more than simple character sketches.

H38. Understandably, there was a wide range of opinion expressed on this question: generally, though, the responses were of a higher quality than on H37.

Statistics

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Unit/Component	Maximum Mark (Raw)	Mean Mark	Standard Deviation	% Contribution to Award
Paper 2F	126	46.8	13.5	70
Paper 3H	126	79.6	12.2	70

Option 1 - Coursework, Paper 2F

Grade	Max. Mark	C	D	E	F	G
Boundary mark	100	60	47	34	21	8

Option 2 - Coursework, Paper 3H

Grade	Max. Mark	A*	A	B	C	D	E
Boundary mark	100	80	71	62	53	44	39

	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Cumulative %	5.6	21.8	48.3	71.2	86.5	94.8	97.9	98.9

Change in Maximum mark on the Foundation Tier paper from 126 to 90

The mark schemes are common to Foundation and Higher tier papers but the top marks are expected to be accessible to Higher tier candidates only. It follows from this that the top Foundation tier candidates normally access only 75% of the available marks, and the change in maximum mark recognises that they can access 100% of the marks available to them. However, the current mark scheme structure will be retained to allow Foundation tier candidates who outperform the expected maximum for their tier on a question to be given the credit for doing so. The total marks for each question will remain the same, so if a candidate on the foundation tier performs exceptionally well on one question they will be rewarded.

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