

English Literature

General Certificate of Secondary Education **GCSE 1901**

Reports on the Units

January 2010

1901/R/10J

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Reports should be read in conjunction with the published question papers and mark schemes for the Examination.

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Any enquiries about publications should be addressed to:

OCR Publications
PO Box 5050
Annesley
NOTTINGHAM
NG15 0DL

Telephone: 0870 770 6622
Facsimile: 01223 552610
E-mail: publications@ocr.org.uk

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2441 Drama Post -1914

General Comments (including 2445)

Once again, a significant number of Centres, representing about a third of all those following the 1901 Specification, took advantage of the staged entry opportunity and entered candidates for the January Drama Units this year. The overall size of the entry for these Units was slightly smaller than in January 2009, largely because of the continuing decline in Foundation Tier entries. In January 2005, Foundation Tier candidates accounted for approximately 40% of the overall entry for that session, whereas in January 2010 the figure was below 10%. Centres had, nevertheless clearly made careful tiering decisions, although a small minority of Higher Tier entrants might have benefitted from answering the more structured Foundation Tier questions. There was widespread praise for the overall quality of work produced and it was absolutely clear that the vast majority of candidates had studied their texts very closely and had enjoyed the process. A sure sign of a generally successful exam series is the liberal sprinkling of adjectives like “mature”, “intelligent”, “incisive”, “perceptive”, and even “wonderful”, “superb” and “awe-inspiring” throughout Examiners’ reports on the exam, and on the scripts themselves.

There was much evidence of thorough, imaginative and sensitive teaching in the way that so many candidates were able to display sound textual knowledge and provide support for their ideas, to focus on the terms of the question, to develop a personal response, to engage the emotions depicted in and generated by these plays and to see themselves not just as readers but as members of an audience. The extract-based questions, in particular, often prompted thoughtful explorations of the ways in which audience responses are affected by sound, movement and gesture, alongside the effect of the dialogue, of characterisation and of plot development. The experience of seeing a stage or film version of the text or of acting out key scenes or of other performance-based approaches like role-play and hot-seating had clearly enriched the learning of many candidates.

There were very few examples of candidates answering more than one question or tackling more than one text, and Foundation Tier candidates, generally, made very good use of the bullets to structure their answers. Fewer candidates were hampered by the damaging tendency to devote lengthy sections of their answer to written features like punctuation, although on occasions magically dramatic properties were still being ascribed to dashes or exclamation marks, irrespective of context, and some candidates were still analysing features like alliteration in the stage directions with little reference to the onstage action, as if the plays were being regarded as written texts only.

The majority of candidates had been carefully and successfully coached in the planning of a 45-minute exam answer but, in some cases, a formulaic approach in which half a dozen headings (context, conflict, language, theme, stage directions, lighting...) were laboriously covered, wasted valuable time, hampered engagement with the particular wording of a particular question on a particular moment/character/relationship in a particular play and undermined achievement. Candidates who had been advised to keep the English Literature Assessment Objectives in view (and even to refer to them as they developed their answers) were also distanced from the task in hand and thoroughly disadvantaged, particularly those who devoted any time to the provision of unhelpful biographical details about the playwrights or provided a meaty historical background for the text as if addressing the social/historical/cultural contexts Assessment Objective which is not assessed in the Drama Units. The best advice to candidates for these Drama Units is to answer the question and let the Assessment Objectives take care of themselves.

Journey’s End remains by far the most popular post-1914 Drama text, closely followed by *Death of a Salesman* and *Whose Life is it Anyway?*, and although *The Caretaker* remains a minority choice, it is clearly taught and studied by a number of dedicated Pinter enthusiasts. *Romeo and*

Juliet remains the most popular pre-1914 choice, followed by *Much Ado About Nothing*, with the non-Shakespearian options, Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People* and Wilde's *An Ideal Husband*, attracting so few candidates that generalised comment in this report is virtually impossible. The pattern of question choice once again varied significantly from Centre to Centre. Although the second question on each play, which tends not to be anchored to a single starting-point in the text, proved to be a successful option for many candidates (particularly on Willy Loman as a father and on the relationship between Juliet and the Nurse), it was not unusual to find every candidate from a Centre either tackling the extract-based question or the empathic question as if their options had been deliberately circumscribed and they had been advised which task to attempt prior to the exam. The empathic question has become more and more popular with each session and there were so many outstanding reproductions of the voices of Linda, Stanhope, Claudio and Juliet, in particular, that many Examiners were moved to lament the absence of the empathic question from the new English Literature Specification. Nevertheless it is clear that the empathic approach remains the 'Marmite' (love-it-or-hate-it) option, and though many Centres make it a central plank of their teaching of Drama texts and consider empathy to be a natural and important component of an engaged response to literature, some continue to avoid it as part of the assessment process.

Finding an effective starting-point for their answer proved a difficult challenge for some candidates and occasionally a huge amount of time was wasted in the production of an introductory paragraph which simply reworked the terms of the question or provided a list of headings (context, conflict, language...) as part of a formulaic approach. Sometimes, candidates spent so long writing out an elaborate plan that they ran out of time and left their answer unfinished. Both extract and empathic answers require an understanding of where the prescribed moment fits in the play and therefore planning time would be much better spent in establishing the exact location of the moment, clarifying which characters are onstage, what they know and what they are feeling at this point, and what the audience knows and is likely to be feeling as well. Successful introductory paragraphs to extract answers go straight for the dramatic context and, for instance, point out: that Stanhope relies on Osborne, had been profoundly affected by the arrival of his boyhood friend, Raleigh, and is fully aware of the likely consequences of the imminent German attack... (*Journey's End*, Question 10); or that Friar Lawrence is the only character onstage who knows that Juliet is actually alive, that the Capulets' last encounter with their daughter involved a furious confrontation and the threat to throw her onto the streets, that the Nurse had also precipitated Juliet's desperate actions by recommending bigamy... (*Romeo and Juliet*, Question 4, 2445). Similarly the starting-point for successful empathic answers has to be a return to the prescribed moment in the text to ascertain exactly what the character knows and has just experienced: it may be the start of the play, for instance, but Linda already knows that Willy borrows money from Charley to pay the bills, she has found the rubber hose and knows of the other failed suicide attempts, but she hopes that the visit of the boys, despite the unexplained frostiness between Willy and Biff, and the possibility of a job based New York, will help... (*Death of a Salesman*, Question 3).

After fourteen sessions assessing these Drama Units since May 2003, it is possible to summarise the features which tend to characterise successful and less successful answers as follows:

Generally

Successful candidates:

- see the texts as scripts for performance and themselves as members of an audience
- see the stage directions as part of the dramatic action of the scene and visualise this onstage action
- pay explicit attention to the wording of the question and balance attention to each strand of the question
- construct purposeful opening paragraphs which focus specifically on a particular question about a particular play
- select and integrate brief quotations to support and amplify their ideas
- avoid formulaic approaches and trust their own direct personal response.

Less successful candidates:

- see the texts as pieces of writing only and themselves as readers
- see the stage directions merely as a pieces of tacked-on written communication and ignore the onstage action
- start with a pre-packaged introduction which is unhelpfully generalised, biographical or list-like and says nothing specific about the play or the question
- lose the focus of the question and import prepared material which has very little direct relevance, or misread the question entirely and write about the wrong character or wrong moment
- become bogged down in feature-logging and detached from the dramatic action
- work through a pre-digested agenda without fully engaging the question or the play, and without expressing a personal response.

Extract-based Questions

Successful candidates:

- devote at least two-thirds of answers to discussing, quoting from and commenting on the extract itself but still convey understanding of the whole-play context
- start by returning to their text to locate the extract in the context of the whole play
- establish the dramatic context for the characters and the audience quickly and economically in the opening paragraph
- ground their whole-play reflections firmly in the detail of the extract
- pay close attention to the way the dramatic action evolves throughout the extract.

Less successful candidates:

- produce generalised answers with little attention to the printed passage, or approach the extract as if it is an “unseen” exercise and give little sense of the rest of the play
- produce a sweeping opening paragraph with an all-purpose list of headings and largely ignore the question
- rarely quote from the extract or copy out huge chunks unaccompanied by any attempt at commentary
- miss the reference to “this moment” in the question and as a result answer the question on the play as a whole with little reference to the printed extract.

Discursive Questions

Successful candidates:

- focus rigorously on (and sometimes challenge) the terms of the question and maintain relevance throughout
- range selectively across the text to find supporting detail for their arguments
- balance their attention to double-stranded questions on two characters/two moments/two elements
- show a sharp awareness of audience response
- quote shrewdly and economically
- reach a relevant conclusion.

Less successful candidates:

- become bogged down in one moment in the play so that the range of reference becomes too narrow
- rely only on the printed extract for the previous question for their ideas and quotations
- spend the bulk of their time on one strand of a two-stranded question
- lose the question entirely and unload pre-packaged and lengthy material about “the American Dream” in *Death of a Salesman* or about coping strategies in *Journey’s End* , or on another previously prepared topic with limited relevance to the question.

Empathic Questions

Successful candidates:

- anchor empathic questions securely to the prescribed moment to focus solely on what that character knows, thinks and feels at that point
- emphasise the character’s dominant feelings and priorities at that point in the play
- select appropriate detail and integrate quotations of the character’s actual words smoothly into the answer
- maintain a limited point-of-view so that knowledge and attitudes are credibly circumscribed
- sustain a voice that rings true in terms of language and tone
- know when to stop and therefore avoid repetition.

Less successful candidates:

- ascribe knowledge, feelings and attitudes to characters in empathic answers which are inappropriate to that character at that point in the play
- work through the character’s experiences in a chronological and unselective way up to the prescribed point without asking “what’s my main feeling at this precise moment?”
- lose the moment entirely and leap on the later moments in the play
- use inappropriate or anachronistic idioms
- over-simplify or stereotype both character and language
- write too much and therefore lose control of point-of-view and repeat themselves.

Comments on Individual Questions

Death of a Salesman

The extract for Question 1 stimulated some fine answers which not only explored the discontent shared by Biff and Happy and conveyed a clear understanding of the impact of their upbringing, but also examined the differences between them. Many candidates wrote very intelligently about the illusions and misplaced enthusiasms of the Loman men, often connecting the ranch idea to the Bill Oliver visit later in the play and making interesting distinctions between Biff's pioneering American Dream and the city-based dream of business success which his brother and father share. The strongest answers noted the similarities between Happy and his father (in their feelings of loneliness and the importance they attach to material success) and often suggested the importance of the Boston incident in setting Biff apart from his brother in terms of values and attitudes. Weaker answers tended to become distracted from the detail of the extract, to cite the American Dream without explanation as if further comment was unnecessary, to take the dream of ranch ownership at face value, to confuse Biff and Happy and their attitudes to their respective paths through life and assume that the sources of their unhappiness were exactly the same. Unassimilated material about Miller's attitude to capitalism, lengthy quotations from *Timebends* and extended comparisons with George and Lennie's dream in *Of Mice and Men* were unhelpful in answers to a question which demands, first and foremost, the close scrutiny of the printed passage. Recognition of the importance of Happy's final line ("what can you make out there?") often marked out strong candidates. Question 2 proved to be a popular discursive option with the majority taking a highly critical view of Willy as a parent. His affair, his inconsistency, his inculcation of flawed values, his attitudes to stealing and study, his tendency to ignore Happy and favour Biff, the contrast with Charley...were often successfully lined up as evidence for the prosecution, but there were many intelligent attempts to address the Higher Tier "How far..." question directly and to take a more balanced view by exploring his devotion to his boys, his good intentions, his willingness to lay down his life to kick-start Biff's business career... In fact, Willy's suicide was handled with great subtlety by many candidates: some saw this as a demonstration of the devoted father's ultimate sacrifice; others as a final act of deluded selfishness; and some simply suggested the rich possibilities of different interpretations. Weaker answers tended to write a broad character study of Willy or to explore his deficiencies as a husband or to spend so long musing on the impact of Willy's own lack of a father figure that the central parenting issues were not tackled directly enough. Many candidates conveyed a sensitive insight into Linda's love for Willy in response to Question 3, and a confident understanding of her knowledge and her preoccupations at the start of the play: the suicide attempts, the rubber hose, the financial worries, the borrowings from Charley, the argument between Willy and Biff, the possibility of a job in New York, the choice of cheese... The desperate hope, the profound anxiety and the devotion were captured very movingly by a large number of candidates. Some, however, were unable to stay anchored to the prescribed moment and recorded Linda's thoughts on Willy's behaviour throughout the opening scene.

The Caretaker

Students of Pinter continue to produce strong answers which are characterised by close attention to language and to the quirks of conversational interaction, although an overly linguistic approach occasionally led candidates away from the dramatic situation and into empty feature-logging, or, in some cases, the unhelpful application of "Grice's Conversational Maxims".

Question 4 was by far the most popular Pinter question and the best answers not only scrutinised the fascinating features of the language but also conveyed an intelligent understanding of the dramatic context, of Aston's astonishing generosity in offering Davies a job and of the evasive, suspicious, ungrateful and non-committal response he receives. The best answers were attentive to the switches in tone and grappled with the humour unintentionally created by Davies and by the faltering nature of the communication between the two men. The weakest answers remained detached from the evolving situation and relationship and remained

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unsure as to the location of the scene in the play. The most common choices of “disturbing” moments for **Question 5** were Aston’s description of his electro-shock treatment and Mick’s use of the electrolux as an offensive weapon. The best answers had a clear focus on the disturbing elements, the dramatic context for each moment and a sense of Pinter’s stagecraft. Strong responses to Aston’s long speech, for instance, often highlighted the contrast with his previous taciturnity, the effect of the dimming of the lights, the pincers, the standing up, the violence, the betrayal by his mother and the slow revelation of his awful experience. Many candidates relished the opportunity to reproduce the distinctive voice of Davies in response to the empathic **Question 6**, and clearly enjoyed including a wide range of authentic references (to Sidcup, shoes, the “scotch git”, “them blacks”, the abusive monk...). The best answers not only captured an astonishingly convincing voice but also stayed effectively in the specific moment and conveyed the switch of allegiance from Aston to Mick, while maintaining a wary recollection of Mick’s previous behaviour.

Whose Life Is It Anyway?

There were many lively responses to the entertaining features of the developing relationship between John and Kay in answer to the very popular **Question 7**, although some candidates found it difficult to tackle the second strand of the question explicitly and explore the broader significance of the extract. Strong answers were prepared to move beyond broad labels like “sexual innuendo” and “comic relief” and to look closely at the sources of the humour in the contrast between John and Kay, in the physical action, the singing, the wordplay and John’s irreverence, and even unpick the effect of specific jokes (like “sterilising instruments”) and make connections with Ken’s situation. The significance of John’s freedom to pursue Kay and his musical career in emphasising what Ken has lost, the implications of the conversation about measles and keeping people alive and the refreshing nature of John’s “unprofessional”, guilt-free approach, were intelligently handled by many candidates. A minority of candidates adopted such a serious approach to the extract that they remained impervious to its entertaining features, dismissed John as uncaring and saw his behaviour simply as sexual harassment in the workplace, as if they were unaware of the way the relationship blossoms later in the play. There were relatively very few answers to **Question 8** but Ken’s eloquence, the Judge’s decision, Emerson’s magnanimity and Dr Scott’s rejected kiss in the final scene and Mrs Boyle’s unwitting exacerbation of Ken’s suffering, proved to be particularly successful choices of moving moments. There were some wonderful answers to **Question 9** which captured Ken’s intelligence, his wit, his logical reasoning and his decisiveness without losing sight of the anguish he is experiencing. The most successful candidates had clearly re-read and fully understood Ken’s conversation with Travers about his fiancée and his parents, and not only used this as a starting point for their answer but conveyed great sensitivity and perception in expressing Ken’s feelings about self-respect, about babies who will never “learn to walk” and about the needs of his fiancée. The very best conveyed a sure grasp of the chronology and realised that after four months in hospital, Ken has a clear view of what he wants to do next and must remove the burden of care from those closest to him. Some candidates thought that the difficult meetings with fiancée and parents followed the scene with Travers, some drifted into an excessively sentimental voice, some were distracted by the American film version and some debated the right-to-choose issue at great and unconvincing length, but the majority produced engaged and authentic portrayals of Ken.

Journey’s End

As is usually the case, Question 10 proved to be the most frequently answered question on the paper and many candidates demonstrated a confident understanding not only of the dramatic context for the extract but also of the impact of the Colonel’s revelations both on the audience and particularly on Stanhope himself, as the selections of the Officers for the raid are gradually finalised. Strong answers paid close attention to the uncomfortable nature of the conversation,

often exploring the impact of the pauses and of Stanhope's largely monosyllabic responses, to issues of rank, to the serious implications of both the attack and the raid, to the growing tension as Stanhope's closest friends are selected for the raid, to Stanhope's sense of duty and pride in his company and to the shift in tone as the conversation turns to dinner. In addition the very best candidates conveyed a clear understanding of what remains largely unsaid, like the fact that the raid is, as Osborne later calls it, "murder", that Raleigh's innocence of what lies in store is seen as an advantage, that Stanhope is desperate to protect Raleigh if he can, that he will find it difficult to cope without Osborne, that he finds duty in conflict with friendship... Less successful candidates wrote about the pauses as if they were the only significant dramatic feature and assumed that pauses always produce tension irrespective of context. The difference between the "raid" and the "attack" was not always clearly grasped and the final conversation about the fish for supper sometimes led candidates into an overlong discussion of food and displacement activities rather than a more thoughtful exploration of the insensitivity of the higher ranks. Successful answers to Question 11 conveyed a confident understanding of the expository nature of the scene between Osborne and Hardy and ranged selectively over a variety of features, like the trench conditions, the stiff-upper-lip humour, the displacement activities and the imminent attack. The strongest candidates established a clear sense of priorities, however, and suggested that the introduction to Stanhope and to Osborne's relationship with him, and the impact on the audience of the conflicting views of Stanhope, are the most significant features of this scene, and a contrast between Hardy and Stanhope was often effectively developed. Weaker answers tended to get rather bogged down in discussions of earwig races and gum boots. Like the Colonel in Question 10 answers, Hardy attracted some extremely vitriolic criticism.

Question 12 generated a great deal of work which Examiners described as "brilliant" and in some Centres this empathic option became the most popular Sherriff choice. Very many candidates offered a viewpoint which was absolutely focused on the prescribed moment and which concentrated selectively on the conflicting feelings produced in Stanhope by the reading of Raleigh's letter. Shame, regret and embarrassment (at his treatment of both Raleigh and Osborne) often dominated the strongest answers, along with Stanhope's self-loathing, his tortured awareness of what he has become and his insecurities about his relationship with Madge. Wistful recollections of schooldays and holidays, and of more innocent times spent with Raleigh pre-War were often movingly included but Stanhope's sense of duty and his responsibility for the men in his command were often triumphantly re-asserted, alongside a believable anger and resentment that Raleigh's arrival has added substantially to his difficulties. Some candidates missed the moment slightly and spent so long on the anger of the letter-seizing or on the contents of the letter itself that they were unable to fully explore Stanhope's reactions to it. Weaker answers tended to be much more one-dimensional, so that a completely devastated and contrite Stanhope would be planning a full apology to Raleigh, giving up whisky and resolving to be a better person, or an angry, vindictive version would be raging about Raleigh as a sort of Hibbert in reverse, a little worm trying to wriggle his way *in* to his company, and searching for more whisky. It was often assumed that the censorship of officer's letters was a normal and compulsory activity for a company commander. The desire to demonstrate detailed knowledge of the play was occasionally at odds with the expression of Stanhope's feelings in the heat of this particular moment so that long passages devoted to Hibbert or Trotter or apricots felt unrealistically tacked on. Quotation was often successfully integrated but there were some lapses into what seems to be regarded as an all-purpose public school language ("spiffing ...topping...cheero") which has more to do with P.G.Wodehouse than R.C.Sherriff and has nothing to do with this moment in the play. The terms "funk" (or often "flunk"), "prig", "swine" and "worm" tend to be used as interchangeable terms of abuse, at times, and strangely modern registers occasionally emerged so that one Stanhope, for instance, felt he had "kicked off like a right pillock" because he had been "necking whisky".

2442 Poetry and Prose Post-1914

As in previous years, the number of candidates entered for this Unit in January was comparatively small. Consequently, examiners saw work on a very limited range of texts. Unsurprisingly the two anthologies, *Opening Lines* and *Opening Worlds*, were the two most popular texts, with the poetry of the 1914-1918 War being discussed with much greater frequency than the poems in the *How It Looks From Here* section. Some texts attracted no, or very few, takers, and the questions on those texts will not be discussed in this Report.

It appeared that there were very few outstanding candidates sitting this examination. As ever, candidates who understood their texts, focused on the set question and supported their response with textual detail, were well rewarded, especially when they engaged with the effects of the language the writers chose to use.

Weaker candidates sometimes seemed unfamiliar with the language used on the question paper, although no new terms were imported. For example, Question 4 on *The Falling Leaves* and the lines from *Spring Offensive* asked candidates to discuss, at Foundation Tier, “images of nature” and at Higher some of the “striking images of nature”. Weaker candidates appeared not to know what an image was, beginning essays (after an introductory overview) with consideration of such issues as the rhyme scheme, the structure of the poems, or searches for alliteration or other literary devices. Careful consideration of what the question was asking them to do usually discriminated between good and weak answers.

Poetry

Problems of gender seemed fairly common in this examination session. Margaret Postgate Cole was too often referred to as “he” and at least once as Margaret Postoffice Cole; less frequently, but still too often, Katherine Tynan Hinkson shared Cole’s cross-gendering fate.

There was some uncertainty on occasion about similes and metaphors (sometimes too about euphemism). Too often metaphors which were actually similes (and similes that were actually metaphors) were referred to and quoted, and euphemisms quoted that actually were not euphemisms.

Question 4, as stated above was often disappointingly answered when candidates paid little attention to the invitation to focus on “images of nature”. There are so many startling images in the lines from *Spring Offensive* that candidates were almost spoiled for choice. Stronger ones chose judiciously and tried to engage with Owen’s writing to show why they found them striking. The images in *The Falling Leaves* are perhaps less striking, but stronger candidates were able to make sound responses to the falling leaves and the snowflakes. Some candidates, at both Foundation and Higher Tiers, made no connection between the falling leaves and soldiers. Some candidates clearly struggled to show much understanding of the Owen, showing this for example when trying to explain what “they breathe like trees unstirred” could possibly mean.

A number of candidates on Question 5 which paired Hinkson’s *Joining the Colours* with Owen’s *The Send-Off* showed a good understanding of the Hinkson, recognising the differences between the feelings of the soldiers and those of the “voice” in the poem. The Owen was usually less well understood, a substantial number of candidates taking the feelings of Owen’s soldiers to be identical to those of Hinkson’s. This seemed to be because both groups were singing. Owen’s soldiers were often thought to be recruits blithely enthusiastic to go to war because they did not know its realities. Many, accordingly, ignored the fact that their faces were “grimly gay”, the adverb suggesting that they knew what they would encounter all too well. Some candidates thought that the first fifteen lines described their return from war.

Question 6 was the least popular of the three questions. Sassoon, as is often the case, was not well understood, the poem's last line often being taken to convey Sassoon's own view of the grieving soldier. However, the way grief has unmanned the soldier was well understood. The Nesbit was usually better understood than *Perhaps* - . A number of responses did not engage with the title of the poem and argued that Brittain had now come to terms with her grief and could "move on".

There were some interesting responses to the poems in *Touched with Fire*. Candidates at Foundation Tier sometimes wrote very thoughtfully about images of nature in *Mushrooms* and *Piano and Drums*, usually rather better on the Plath than the Okara. The same was true of responses at Higher Tier on the power of nature. The mushrooms' strength in numbers and developing power were often well understood and supported, but the raw power of jungle life was not considered very deeply. The opportunity to discuss/analyse Okara's language was too often not taken. Responses to Question 12 on the portrayal of suffering in *Dulce et Decorum Est* and *Refugee Mother and Child* were most successful when candidates looked at the language of the poems and not just the situations described in them.

Prose

The majority of candidates tackled the questions on *Opening Worlds*. Responses to the extract-based question were rather mixed, with candidates showing greater understanding of *Snapshots of a Wedding* than of *The Train from Rhodesia*. Most were able to comment on Kegoletile's inner conflict involving his feelings for Mathata and Neo and his reasons for choosing to marry Neo. The varied emotions of the wife in *The Train from Rhodesia* were not well understood. Some candidates thought she felt guilt because she herself had beaten the price of the lion down to one-and-six. Few engaged with the significance of her discovery of "a void" and "feeling like this again". Often there was too little focus on the Gordimer extract, and too much narration of the couple's treatment of the poverty-stricken vendor. Often the repetition of "One-and-six" was identified, without comment on why it was repeated. Very few commented on the effect of the simile comparing her sense of shame to "sand pouring" and the repetition of "pouring".

Question 14 on family relationships in *The Red Ball* and *The Pieces of Silver* proved popular. The relationship between Clement and Evelina was usually well understood, and her maternal treatment of Clement illustrated and supported. Bolan's relationship with his father was less understood. Candidates often began with a lengthy discussion of the beginning of the story and Bolan's seeking out of parental figures in the Woodford Square fountain. This material was not always developed, and sometimes came at the expense of the exclusion of Bolan's relationship with his father. Quite often candidates did not mention the vicious beating that Bolan receives from his father. Sometimes too a drifting from the question weakened candidates' responses, with a number focusing on poverty, with particular reference to the Dovecots' "poor, wretched coop" of a room and the birds able to soar free, and the poverty of Bolan's family. Although comparison is not required in prose responses, some candidates clearly felt that they needed to compare the relationships in the two stories; often the search for points of comparison led to loss of focus on the question.

Question 15 on the thoughts, feelings and actions of young children was answered well by candidates who identified young children correctly. Leela was usually the focal point of responses to *Leela's Friend*. However, a surprising number thought that Sidda was a young child and discussed his thoughts, feelings and actions. A number of candidates wrote about all the children in *Games at Twilight*. The best responses to this story wisely focused closely on Ravi, whose feelings are given closest attention.

There were some responses to *Empire of the Sun*, principally to the extracts featuring Basie. Candidates wrote with some confidence on the first extract, highlighting Basie's likely reasons

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for the interest he takes in Jim, but with rather less on the second. However, they were usually able to make the point that Basie is in control of both situations.

The few responses to *The Old Man and the Sea* were mostly to the extract describing the old man's return. The best focused on the word "moving" in the question and engaged closely with the extract, whilst weaker responses offered a paraphrase.

Responses to Orwell's presentation of Julia in the extract from *Nineteen Eighty-Four* were often thorough and workmanlike. Julia was seen as sporty, apparently an ideal member of the Party, promiscuous as well as "not clever" academically, but bright enough to enjoy herself without being found out. Some saw her as memorable for being the catalyst for Winston's actions and were able to refer to other moments in the novel without losing focus on the extract or the question. Responses were generally well supported, but there was little detailed discussion of Orwell's language.

Overall, the quality of work submitted was rather mixed. Examiners felt that closer engagement with the language the writers use, "how" they say what they say and not just the "what" they say, would have helped candidates to reach the higher bands.

2444 Pre-1914 Texts

General Comments

There was a small entry this January, but a pleasing one; examiners reported that candidates at both Tiers showed that they had been well taught and well prepared for the examination. There was a generally good knowledge of the texts studied, and almost without exception answers were supported by full and relevant quotation from the texts. In contrast to what has been the normal pattern, Shakespeare answers, all on *Romeo and Juliet*, were often the least successful, and the poetry and prose responses were often very strong and confident. There were virtually no rubric infringements, and almost all candidates had clearly timed their writing well, so that all three answers were completed and of good length.

Comments on Individual Questions

Only a few texts were used this session, so where a text is not mentioned it is simply because there were no answers to the questions on it.

Romeo and Juliet

- 3 This was by a long way the more popular of the two questions, and usually managed with confidence and often sensitivity. Most answers focused well upon the changing emotions felt by Juliet as the passage develops, focusing upon her concern about the length of time that has passed, the possibility that the Nurse may not have met Romeo, her age and therefore her slowness, followed by Juliet's excitement and uncertainty when she finally does return. The best answers showed an appreciation of the dramatic irony of the scene; the audience is forewarned of the eventual outcome of this relationship, which lends a particular pathos to Juliet's situation in the extract. A few answers ranged too widely beyond the set passage; setting the context briefly is, of course, important (though it was very disappointing that several completely misplaced the extract within the play), but the focus of an answer should be firmly upon what is printed on the examination paper. A surprising number asserted that Juliet speaks in prose here rather than her customary blank verse – but of course both her speeches here are wholly in verse. In contrast, some candidates said that the Nurse uses blank verse, when she actually speaks only five words here.
- 4 A relatively unpopular option, but handled very well indeed by those who wrote in response to it. There were some excellent and furiously Tybalt-like soliloquies, catching his rage and disbelief at his uncle's determination to maintain the peace. Many managed to incorporate textual quotations and half-quotations with fluency and ease, giving their answers a real authority and conviction.

Opening Lines: War

- 9 Most candidates attempting this question gave quite well supported responses to the peacefulness of the natural settings in both poems. Most showed some awareness of the way in which this heightens the tragedy of the effects of war, but only the very best answers were able to make this point clearly. For example, they noted the natural description of the land in *After Blenheim* and the discovery of the skull, but their response to the horror of the moment and what it implied (the deaths of hundreds of men) was

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muted. Most answers would have benefited from a closer focus on the language; there was not a great deal of connection with the poetry.

- 10 The terms of this question tended to be handled more successfully. The most chosen poems were the Tennyson and the Kipling and candidates did not find it difficult to find reasons for feeling sympathy for the men. The poems were well known, and answers offered clear support and quotation, but again, more emphasis on the language and imagery was needed for the highest bands.

Opening Lines: Town and Country

- 11 Most responses here were very clearly aware of the different moods created by Wilde and Meynell, though too often candidates relied over-much on simple and occasionally unsupported use of the two words “positive” and “negative”. The two poets’ uses of colour were of course central to most of the good answers, especially when exploring Wilde’s repetition of “yellow”; there were some very sensitive personal responses to his comparisons of an omnibus to a butterfly and his picturing of fog as a delicate silken scarf; a number of answers appeared to be uncertain about what colour jade is, despite being told in line 11, though this rarely spoilt some very good responses. Contrasts with Meynell’s “graceless grass” were many and straightforward, the alliteration here emphasising her point very forcefully; and her later uses of colour were discussed by almost all candidates. Almost no candidate in either Tier failed to link the two poems, and many were able to do so fluently and smoothly throughout their answers – this was a mark of considerable strength in many scripts.
- 12 Relatively few answered this question, but those who did so were usually well able to see regret in whichever two poems they chose – perhaps less convincingly in the case of Yeats than Hardy or Kipling, which is probably why *The Lake Isle* was so rarely used. Regret at the power that natural forces have over humanity in both *Beeny Cliff* and *The Way Through the Woods* was well discussed. There is almost always at least one answer which assumes that Beeny Cliff is the speaker in the poem, and this session was no different; amusing, perhaps, for an examiner, but suggestive of very slack reading by at least one candidate.

Blake: Songs of Innocence and Experience

- 13 A very small number tackled this question, but although they certainly saw the huge contrast that Blake draws between the peaceful and idyllic picture drawn in *Night* and the horrific images in *London* the answers were generally quite short and more descriptive than critically exploratory.

Dickens: Hard Times

- 19 This was answered by almost all candidates who had studied the novel, and almost invariably too it was managed with some confidence and detail; Louisa’s outburst of emotion and pain was seen sensitively by all candidates, and the passage was invariably seen as moving for this reason, as well as for the fact that perhaps for the first time in the novel Dickens wants us to see Mr Gradgrind in a softer light; our sympathies move strangely and perhaps even unwillingly towards him as well as towards his daughter. It is indeed, as many said, a major and moving moment in the novel; one examiner put her reactions in this way: “Better answers responded strongly to Louisa’s predicament, seeing that this is a climactic moment and that she has finally found the strength to confront her father. The very best answers found his responses moving too; they saw him not as a bad

man, but one who has tried his best and been wrong, and who now realises this. The fact that Louisa does not condemn him either, adds force to this.”

- 20** There were not many answers on Mrs Sparsit, and most of them tended to be narrative in base rather than tightly character-focused, and very few explored how she is characterised by Dickens. Better answers referred to her spying on Louisa and Harthouse, her toadying to Bounderby and her self-importance. The best answers commented on the symbolism of her nose, and on her name, which is suggestive of meanness. One candidate commented on her role as a comparison to Bitzer, who has similarly nasty qualities.

Eliot: Silas Marner

- 23** This was by far the more popular question, and done with almost universal warmth and understanding; teenage candidates clearly have a very sensitive awareness of at least some of the problems faced by parents! Silas’s difficulties here were seen and explored with real perception and understanding by many, and textual support was good; his dilemma – how to punish the first person that he can love since his arrival in Raveloe – was perceptively seen by candidates, and there was a good deal too of amusement at Eppie’s naughtiness and baby language. A few answers failed, even by implication, to address the humour of the passage, but the great majority did address this at least to some extent. It may be worth reminding candidates at this point how vital it is that they read what the question actually says and what it asks.
- 24** There were a few responses to this question, mostly managed with sound knowledge and understanding, and often a good deal of sympathy – whether justified or not – for the problems of a wife-less and mother-less trio of men.

2445 Drama Pre-1914

General Comments (see 2441 Section)

There was a relatively small entry for these papers (especially at Foundation Tier), compared with 2441, which makes generalised comment difficult. Only two of the four texts on offer (*Much Ado About Nothing* and *Romeo and Juliet*) appear to have been studied by a significant number of candidates for this particular January session, with *Romeo and Juliet* proving to be by far the more popular Shakespearian option and a tiny number of Ibsen enthusiasts studying (and clearly enjoying) *An Enemy of the People*, but Wilde's *An Ideal Husband* attracting little or no interest this time around.

Comments on Individual Questions

Much Ado About Nothing

Question 1 was the most popular *Much Ado...* choice and the most successful answers tackled both strands of the question explicitly, scrutinised the language of the extract and responded to the nature of the “merry war” between Beatrice and Benedick at this point. The best answers conveyed a clear awareness of the dramatic context, particularly in relation to Benedick's challenging of Claudio, and of the interplay between the seriousness and humour in the scene, and tried hard to explore the sources of humour in the dialogue and in the song. There were very few answers to **Question 2** but the best focused explicitly on the word “entertaining”, ranged widely and selectively across the text, suggested a variety of comic effects, explored the verbal infelicities and the incompetence, saw the pair as a double act and often shaped a strong personal response to their bumbling but ironically effective resolution of the plot. Some answers were completely devoted to Dogberry and ignored Verges' role as foil and comedy sidekick. **Question 3** attracted a large number of candidates in some Centres and there were many powerful portrayals of a tortured Claudio, full of anger, doubts, regrets and insecurities, and often preoccupied with a convincing sense of violated honour. There was a tendency to overlook the significance of his shocked questioning and of the “if” in his final speech in Act Three Scene Two, and to depict him as so completely taken in by Don John that he has already become completely and viciously vindictive, almost as if candidates were placing the moment after he has witnessed the scene at Hero's chamber-window.

Romeo and Juliet

Once again, the extract-based question (**Question 4**) proved to be the most popular *Romeo and Juliet* choice, and many strong candidates managed to balance a clear understanding of the context with close consideration of the power of the language in the extract. The dramatic ironies were often intelligently explored, not just in relation to the role of the Friar but also in developed contrasts between the grief of Lord and Lady Capulet and their earlier treatment of their daughter. Some excellent answers distinguished between the ways in which Lord Capulet, Lady Capulet and the Nurse express their grief, with impressive attention to the nuances of their language and awareness of status. Candidates occasionally argued that the eloquent reactions of the Capulets and of Paris are artificial and insincere, especially compared with those of the Nurse, but found this line hard to sustain given the poignancy of the poetry. A few candidates seemed to believe that the Nurse is included in the Friar's plan and is therefore faking her grief. In a minority of Centres, the answers to both **Question 4** and **Question 5** were unbalanced by overlong digressions on the historical context (on the Elizabethan audience, on wet nurses, on Elizabethan attitudes to the “three virtues of Silence, Obedience and Chastity”...) as if Assessment Objective Four (historical/social/cultural contexts...) was being unnecessarily

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foregrounded. Nevertheless, there were many fine answers to **Question 5** which focused sharply on the intimacy of Juliet's relationship with the Nurse, and often contrasted this with her relationship with her mother. Sharp attention to the memorable detail of key scenes, to the Nurse's role as confidante and go-between, to the comic elements, to the Nurse's lack of wisdom and final betrayal of the young lovers... often characterised the strongest answers. Weaker answers were often distracted by previously practised essays on the relationship and included lengthy sections of pure narrative, so that the focus on the memorable features was inevitably submerged. **Question 6** on Juliet was another successful empathic choice for several candidates, with some very moving representations of her powerful and conflicting feelings at this early point in the play. There was much sensible and effective integration of quotation from her first meeting with Romeo and her later balcony speeches, although some answers displayed an extraordinary capacity for Juliet to foretell the whole direction of the play, including marriage as an attempt to resolve the feud, as if candidates had lost contact with the prescribed moment. Repetitive and sentimental gushing without really engaging Juliet's voice and the detail of her situation, also undermined some answers.

An Enemy of the People

There were a few lively responses to the climactic scene between the Stockmann brothers in answer to **Question 10** with some close attention to the building tension and the strength of the language. Understanding of the conflict within the extract was not always confidently grounded in a grasp of the broader dramatic context and of the troubled relationship between the brothers throughout the play.

2446 Poetry and Prose Pre-1914

There were too few entries in this session to make valid generalisations about performance. Centres are recommended to read the Principal Examiner's report for the June 2009 series. Comments on performance there still apply to the current examination.

2443 Pre-1914 Texts (Coursework)

2447 Post-1914 Texts (Coursework)

General Comments

As has been pointed out before, the January coursework submission is qualitatively different from that of the summer. Many centres have just one or two candidates, often borderline Band 4s who are re-submitting; in these cases it would be helpful if centres indicated which work is new. For other institutions January is a welcome opportunity to present the work of very able students, or of large entries, to clear the rest of the year for other priorities. Centres with small numbers of candidates were invited to send in their folders without waiting for sample requests. Many did this before Christmas and so avoided the January weather problems which blew such a blizzard through good organisational intentions.

There was evidence of rather rushed administration in a small minority of centres in cases of clerical errors, Authentication Forms not being completed and centre and candidate numbers not being entered. All of these factors can delay the task or lead to coursework being lost.

It is also understandable that where teachers are providing extra tuition for a few re-sits, doubtless untimetabled and in their own time, shortcuts are being taken in providing new work. This can be manifest in a number of ways. It may be over-teaching - where students are obviously working from given scaffolding; or it may be the opposite - where there is less rigorous supervision and students are resorting to long biographical or contextual information drawn down unselectively from the internet. It may be in the setting of limited tasks drawn from rather jaded stock. Tension in Act 3. Scene 1 of 'Romeo and Juliet' enables the students to comment on language, stagecraft and dramatic effect but if it has little sense of context within the whole play the achievement is likely to remain marginal. Guilt in the same play is also an easy and ready title, but only the best students can move beyond a forensic investigation citing each character's role, to an evaluation of language, form and effect. A quick way of revising a text is to watch the film and there were occasions when the film has become the text rather than a mere aid.

The borderline candidate is often characterised by presenting appropriate information that meets the criteria for Band 4, but presenting it in a way that lacks structure, understanding and coherence. Often there is long explanation without analysis and comments on key points have not been selected from among the extensive descriptions or narrative. Such a student might be helped by more careful question setting which does not make too many or diverse demands and has some supportive prompts which direct towards the assessment objectives. In their teaching centres are increasingly aware of the importance of context (AO4) but should ensure this is used in a more measured way to inform an answer. The extreme is the use of First World War poetry merely as historical documents. Where a pre-1914, post-1914 comparison is used, AO1 and AO2 must emerge strongly from exploration of the pre-1914 poem.

The few centres that presented Unit 2447 had the opportunity to experiment with new texts, give choices to their students and provide space for able candidates to extend their range and experience. Understandably the extra reading required to combine Unit 2447 with Unit 2434 is a challenge not practicable for most. But it was on Unit 2447 that moderators were able to enjoy some freshness. Among some of the prose texts were *The Girl with a Pearl Earring*, *Behind the Scenes at the Museum*, *Brideshead*, *The Kite Runner*, *The Boy in Striped Pyjamas* and *The Wasp Factory*. In poetry, there were Betjeman, Adcock, Duffy and Fanthorpe. There were *Amadeus* and *A Streetcar named Desire* in drama but also the chance to raid the stockroom for some good old favourites such as *Inspector Calls* and *Journey's End*. *Talking Heads* and

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Spoonface Steinberg are fascinating texts to use but less conventional and harder to align with some of the assessment criteria. But it would be a pity to exclude them and ways might be examined of alerting students to the dramatic qualities of monologue and radio.

A vast majority of centres were thoroughly well organised, have standardisation procedures embedded in their routine and make accurate judgements. Some of the teacher annotations were exact and detailed and demonstrated how familiar colleagues are with the meticulous application of criteria. Lucky the students who have received such penetrating and sensitive feedback during their GCSE years.

2448 Post-1914 Texts

There was a small entry, some thirty scripts, all at Higher Tier. The majority answered on *Death of a Salesman*, *Opening Lines* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. The extract-based questions were invariably selected.

Better answers to Question 3 were able to offer some critique of the way Willy is 'bringing them up' and some sense of irony bearing in mind the relationship between Willy and Biff elsewhere in the play. Weaker answers commented superficially on stage action in the extract and said little or nothing about the effects of the flashback.

Better answers to Question 9 were able to include a reasonable overview of each poem in exploring what makes the images disturbing. Weaker answers on *Mirror* interpreted the lake literally (eg 'the mirror down by the lake'). Weaker answers on *The Hare* were reluctant to allow that the poem is all the more disturbing because it is mysterious, and so were at pains to explain the poem rather than answer the question.

Better answers to Question 11 not only quoted words and phrases in support but also showed an overall grasp of the subtle point of view of *Lamentations* (the sergeant's is not the same as Sassoon's) and the sense of being in denial communicated in *Reported Missing*. Weaker answers were very general in their comments.

Better answers to Question 29 commented on Winston's last remark about 'kinds of failure' in the context of the whole book, included the characterisation of Julia, and understood why Katharine is 'uneasy'. Weaker answers saw the sunny memory of Winston's as essentially pleasant and said little about Big Brother, then or in the present.

Grade Thresholds

General Certificate of Secondary Education
English Literature (1901)
January 2010 Assessment Series

Unit Threshold Marks

Unit		Maximum Mark	a*	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	u
2441/1	Raw	21				19	16	13	10	7	0
	UMS	27				24	20	16	12	8	0
2441/2	Raw	30	27	24	21	19	16	14			0
	UMS	40	36	32	28	24	20	16			0
2442/1	Raw	46				33	27	22	17	12	0
	UMS	69				60	50	40	30	20	0
2442/2	Raw	66	48	43	37	32	27	24			0
	UMS	100	90	80	70	60	50	40			0
2443	Raw	45	42	37	32	27	22	17	12	7	0
	UMS	60	54	48	42	36	30	24	18	12	0
2444/1	Raw	42				33	26	20	14	8	0
	UMS	41				36	30	24	18	12	0
2444/2	Raw	60	52	46	40	35	30	27			0
	UMS	60	54	48	42	36	30	24			0
2445/1	Raw	21				19	16	13	10	7	0
	UMS	27				24	20	16	12	8	0
2445/2	Raw	30	27	25	22	19	16	14			0
	UMS	40	36	32	28	24	20	16			0
2446/1	Raw	46				37	30	23	17	11	0
	UMS	69				60	50	40	30	20	0
2446/2	Raw	66	57	51	45	39	33	30			0
	UMS	100	90	80	70	60	50	40			0
2447	Raw	45	42	37	32	27	22	17	12	7	0
	UMS	60	54	48	42	36	30	24	18	12	0
2448/1	Raw	42				34	27	21	15	9	0
	UMS	41				36	30	24	18	12	0
2448/2	Raw	60	46	42	38	34	29	26			0
	UMS	60	54	48	42	36	30	24			0

Specification Aggregation Results

Overall threshold marks in UMS (ie after conversion of raw marks to uniform marks)

	Maximum Mark	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	U
1901	200	180	160	140	120	100	80	60	40	0

The cumulative percentage of candidates awarded each grade was as follows:

	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	U	Total No. of Cands
1901	4.0	13.0	35.6	65.9	89.9	96.3	98.5	99.6	100	583

583 candidates were entered for aggregation this series.

For a description of how UMS marks are calculated see;
<http://www.ocr.org.uk/learners/ums/index.html>

Statistics are correct at the time of publication

OCR (Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations)
1 Hills Road
Cambridge
CB1 2EU

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