

Candidate Style Answers

OCR GCSE English Literature J360

Unit A664 Contemporary Poetry – Examined unit

This Support Material booklet is designed to accompany the OCR GCSE English Literature specification for teaching from September 2010.

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Introduction

OCR has produced these candidate style answers to support teachers in interpreting the assessment criteria for the new GCSE specifications and to bridge the gap between new specification release and availability of exemplar candidate work.

This content has been produced by subject experts, with the input of Chairs of Examiners, to illustrate how the sample assessment questions might be answered and provide some commentary on what factors contribute to an overall grading. The candidate style answers are not written in a way that is intended to replicate student work but to demonstrate what a “good” or “excellent” response might include, supported by examiner commentary and conclusions.

As these responses have not been through full moderation and do not replicate student work, they have not been graded and are instead, banded “middle” or “high” to give an indication of the level of each response.

Please note that this resource is provided for advice and guidance only and does not in any way constitute an indication of grade boundaries or endorsed answers.

Unit A664 Contemporary Poetry

Question

GILLIAN CLARKE: *Miracle on St David's Day*

How does Clarke make this poem particularly moving for you? Remember to refer closely to the language she uses.

Candidate A

I think the poem *Miracle on St David's Day* is very moving because of the way the poet describes the people in it. The poet has gone to a country house which is a home which cares for the "insane". She is there to give a poetry reading to some of these mentally handicapped people and their carers. The "miracle" is that a "big mild man" who the poem says "has never spoken" talks and recites a poem called "The Daffodils".

The poem is broken up into seven stanzas of five lines each. The last stanza is different as it has only three lines. The lines do not rhyme but there is a lot of enjambment which helps the lines to flow.

Gillian Clarke describes some of the people in the audience. I feel sorry for them as they are mentally challenged. One old woman interrupts and offers Gillian Clarke buckets of coal. Another woman "sits not listening" as she cannot concentrate on very much. A beautiful boy is listening carefully but he is just having a good day. As he is schizophrenic, he must also have bad days. The patient Gillian Clarke really notices is "a big mild man". He is "dumb" which does not mean that he is stupid. It means that he can't talk. He suddenly gets up. Here the poet uses alliteration to show how important this is. "He is suddenly standing, silently." This sudden movement makes the poet afraid. Then the man begins to recite "The Daffodils". I think he does not find talking easy as the poet uses a simile, "Like slow movement of spring water" to show that after winter comes spring which means new life. It is moving because this man has not spoken for years. When he was at school the class learned poetry by heart and that was when he must have learned this poem. Something about the poetry reading has reminded him of what he learned at school so the "miracle" happens.

In my opinion this poem is moving because it makes me sorry for people who are mentally handicapped. I am happy for the big mild man because now he might be able to leave the home because he can now speak.

Commentary

This response begins with a promising overview but it quickly gets bogged down in issues of verse form that are not made relevant to the question. There is some repeating of words from the poem with some attempt at explanation and as a result is a lower response.

Candidate B

This poem is particularly moving because it records how “a big mild man”, a labourer, who has not spoken for years is miraculously able to speak and recite a poem, “The Daffodils”. Gillian Clarke sympathetically describes him and other patients in a country house which is now a home for what Clarke calls “the insane”.

The opening stanza is slightly misleading. Although Clarke says the house “might be” a country house, that is not really what it is. The gardens have “yellow and open-mouthed daffodils”, the personified sun treads, like a special guest, the path “among cedars and enormous oaks”. Sadly those in the home, being “insane”, are unlikely to be able to enjoy and appreciate the grounds.

The second verse begins very abruptly and surprisingly. “I am reading poetry to the insane” doesn’t sound very sympathetic towards her audience, one of whom rather amusingly interrupts the reading to offer the reader “as many buckets of coal as I need”. This can be taken as moving, as the old woman does not appear to know that her interruption is rude. The main figure in the audience is the “big mild man” who movingly has to be “tenderly led/to his chair” because he cannot find it himself. The poet says he has never spoken, although we later believe that he did speak in his earlier years if he was part of a class that “recited poetry by rote”. It is moving to read that he stopped speaking when “the dumbness of misery” fell on him. It is not clear whether this means that the misery of being dumb fell on him or whether there was some miserable event that made him dumb.

The poem is partly about the power of poetry. The labourer responds to the poetry reading; he “rocks gently to the rhythms” the alliteration linking his movement to what the poet later calls the “music of speech”. Alliteration is again used to show the suddenness of the labourer’s movements. From rocking to the rhythms he is “suddenly standing, silently”. His voice is “hoarse” because it has not been used for so long. The poet uses the moving image of water moving slowly from the start of a small stream. His ability to speak has an incredible effect. The nurses who know him are “frozen” in amazement, and his fellow patients though some have been “absent” seem to pay attention. Even the flowers seem impressed; the daffodils are as still as the “frozen” nurses. Perhaps that is right, as reciting “The Daffodils” has been his first speaking for years.

The miracle is moving, and we are made to feel great sympathy for this man who has been dumb for so long and is given back his power of speech by poetry.

Commentary

The response focuses on the word “moving” in the question and makes useful comments on the poem’s structure and language particularly in the penultimate paragraph. There is good awareness of one of the themes of the poem, although the image of daffodils might have been developed more fully. This is a higher response.