

Moderators' Report/
Principal Moderator Feedback

Summer 2015

GCSE English (5EH3A)
Poetry and Creative Response

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5EH3A Report to Centres

General Overview

For Reading and Writing, centres and candidates have a choice of four themes to answer on set by Edexcel: Relationships, Clashes and Collisions, Somewhere, Anywhere and Taking a Stand.

For **Poetry (Reading)** candidates must complete one reading task individually and following their preparation they have up to two hours to complete the task. The response must be a written response of up to 1000 words *or* a digital media response which demonstrates that they have read and understood the poems *or* a multi-modal response combining the previous options. For the chosen theme candidates respond to **two** poems which they can select from the Edexcel Poetry Anthology and **one** poem which is set by Edexcel and changes every year. They prepare by making notes and planning their response to the task.

The reading response must show that candidates can:

- read the poems with insight and engagement
- interpret the writers' ideas and perspectives.

For **Creative Writing** candidates must complete one writing task on their chosen theme. For each theme, there is a choice of stimulus material which is designed to be used as a starting point. For three of the themes in this series, the stimulus material consists of a series of four photographs, and for one theme a digital video clip is provided. Following their preparation they have up to two hours to complete the task and their response must be an individual written response of up to 1000 words. The writing response must show that candidates can:

- Write clearly, effectively and imaginatively in a chosen form to engage the reader
- Ensure spelling, punctuation and grammatical structures are accurate and appropriate for purpose and effect

As was the case last summer, there was a drop in the entry for this unit from the previous summer series. Centres often appeared to be entering part of a cohort rather than the entire group. Whilst a range of marks were seen, there were fewer at the top of the range than in previous years.

Across the four themes, responses were fairly evenly divided between 'Clashes and Collisions' and 'Relationships'. Some centres chose 'Taking A Stand' and a small number used 'Somewhere, Anywhere'. Whilst there is still limited evidence of differentiation in the choice of poems from the Anthology, there was more variation than in previous series. As is noted in the PM report each year, choice of poems and even of clusters can be an excellent tool in allowing candidates of different abilities to produce their best work, and some centres used this to good effect, with different groups responding to different clusters.

For Clashes and Collisions 'Exposure', 'Belfast Confetti' and 'Invasion' were particularly popular and for Relationships, 'Valentine', and 'Rubbish at Adultery' were seen most often. Responses to the set poem 'Absence' were generally good and focused on the ways in which the poet creates mood and tone: candidates were less successful in engaging with 'Bayonet Charge', although some moderators reported strong, developed responses. At times candidates included a significant amount of biographical detail and speculation about Hughes' intentions, whilst others described the story of the war. Moderators noted some stronger responses to 'August 6th 1945' this series, but also commented that 'Your Dad Did What' and 'Hitcher' were often poorly dealt with by candidates. As the specification progresses, it has become even more evident that some centres require candidates to analyse the same two anthology poems every year regardless of the set poem for the series: one centre offers responses on 'Hitcher' and 'The Class Game' each year and another uses 'Valentine' and 'Rubbish at Adultery'. Although there is no requirement to compare poems, the task usually works best where candidates are able to make conceptual links across all of texts studied, and therefore centres would do well to consider which of the Anthology poems will work best with the set poem.

Once again, there is significant evidence that the use of literary terms can become a straitjacket rather than a supportive framework, leading to a tendency to 'feature spot': this year, the inclusion of 'Bayonet Charge' led numerous candidates to use the term 'in media res' with little evidence of any real appreciation of this, for example. While the use of 'Point, Evidence, Explanation' is helpful in allowing candidates to structure their writing, for students working towards Band 5, there is a need to show perceptive and discriminating analysis, and for this purpose a fully conceptualised response is necessary, rather than a more mechanical process.

No digital or multi-modal responses were seen by the Principal Moderator and very few were reported by moderators.

For Creative Writing candidates produced a wide range of thought-provoking responses. Candidates do not have to use the same theme for the Poetry and the Creative Writing task, and this year a wide range of responses were seen.

The paintings offered for 'Relationships' had clearly engaged candidates' imaginations, and some exceptional pieces of writing were seen. Responses to the Clashes and Collisions film clip were sometimes quite literal, and at times too ambitious in their scope: it is always better to describe one experience in detail than to try to cover the entire war in 1000 words. Fewer centres responded to the photographs for 'Somewhere, Anywhere' but where these were used some thoughtful and focused descriptive pieces were offered. This series saw a number of very interesting anachronisms such as soldiers in the trenches checking their mobile phones!

Moderators reported that control of tense and punctuation was improved in this series, and one moderator noted a welcome reduction in the overuse of exclamation marks. Often, however, comma splicing is not picked up by the centre, or too much emphasis is placed on one aspect of AO3iii – candidates

are marked down for spelling where punctuation is very strong, or vice versa.

Most centres interpreted and applied the marking criteria accurately and consistently: there were relatively few severely inconsistent centres.

The main inconsistency remains the boundary between Band 3 and Band 4, and, in this series, Band 4 and Band 5. As noted in previous reports, Band 3 responses are '**sound**' – they explain how the writer has used techniques to create effect, and support these points with specific examples. Band 4 responses are '**thorough**' – understanding is more developed and the response is sustained and consistent. For Band 5, candidates need to demonstrate '**perceptive**' understanding across all three poems with well selected and discriminating use of evidence. The rigid frameworks referred to above sometimes prevented candidates from moving into the top of Band 4 and into Band 5: candidates need the freedom to move beyond PEE and PEEL in order to develop their own conceptualised response.

Unlike Unit 1, there is no requirement for comparison in this unit. The key skills are engaging with the meaning of the poems and showing an understanding of the poets' choices of language and technique. As in the previous series, there is still some evidence of 'over-preparation' which limits candidates.

The application of the marking criteria for the writing task was mainly accurate. Once again, the main issues came from responses which were poorly planned and structured. The assessment criteria for AO3 (i and ii) were applied consistently in most cases at Bands 1 and 2. Marks at the boundaries between Bands 3, 4 and 5 were less secure. The main issue in this area was control. Band 3 specifies 'some evidence of crafting in the construction of sentences' and 'controlled paragraphing', whereas Band 4 specifies 'variety in the construction of sentences' and 'secure organisation'. At times, responses with little control of sentence structure or paragraphing were placed in Band 4 because some of the vocabulary choices were apt and effective. In such cases, centres need to consider the balance between all of the bullet points in the mark scheme. Band 5 responses are typically 'convincing', 'sophisticated' and 'compelling'.

Assessment criteria for AO3 (iii) were applied consistently in most cases, although with some leniency at the top of the range and harshness towards to bottom of the range. For 6 or 7 marks there should be clear evidence of using punctuation devices with precision and sophistication **for deliberate effect**. Whilst assessment of spelling was mainly consistent, assessment of punctuation was not. Again, a useful reference point for punctuation is the accurate use of commas – some centres seemed to struggle with this, and there was evidence of teachers automatically correcting errors as they marked but then awarding marks which were higher than their corrections suggested.

It is important to emphasise the different demands of the various units for English and English Language. For Reading, centres still need to understand that there is no requirement for comparison, unlike 5EH01, and that

candidates do best when they actively engage with the poems rather than trying to work through checklists of literary techniques and contextual background. The quality of digital and multi-modal responses is varied. For Writing, control of expression and sentence structure is crucial. The best tasks allow candidates to clearly identify audience, purpose and narrative voice. There have been some improvements to this and fewer over-long responses were seen this series.

Grade Boundaries

Grade boundaries for this, and all other papers, can be found on the website on this link:

<http://www.edexcel.com/iwantto/Pages/grade-boundaries.aspx>

