

GCSE

Edexcel GCSE

English B (1204)

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Examiners' Report

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General Comments

The papers were generally found to be very accessible to candidates. They showed an engagement with the texts, but some continue to have difficulty in maintaining a clear analytical focus on the specific demands of the question, rather than employing a narrative approach which does not always remain strictly relevant. In Section B, candidates should make sure that they write on TWO stories, since some are still covering only one or writing very little on the second. Time for planning and checking is essential if candidates are not to lose marks through inaccuracy or carelessness.

1204 2F

Section A

As with 1203 Specification A there was a higher proportion of candidates this year sitting the Foundation Tier, no doubt hoping to secure the required C grade on the Resit. Imbalance in dealing with the two poems sometimes meant that the candidate did not achieve the mark he or she was capable of: often, one poem was dealt with in some detail whilst the other was given only a sentence or two. Some candidates indeed commented on only one poem (again, often in some detail), but this inevitably affected adversely the mark they could receive. A common and familiar weakness was the lack of detailed language points; there was much feature spotting or inclusion of comments such as 'the poets used good language'. Some responses would have been awarded higher marks if they had been more detailed; it was obvious from the standard of writing and expression that candidates were able to offer thoughtful responses but wrote only very briefly.

Question 1

A few candidates ignored the wording of the question, which indicated the two poems to be commented on, and used 'Hide and Seek': this was obviously a prepared response, but one which could not be rewarded since it was not relevant. Other candidates showed an understanding of the set poems but could have developed the range of points covered.

Question 2

Some answers chose an appropriate second poem, such as 'The Send-off', to be paired with 'The House', in which unusual or unexpected events were clearly explored. In general, there could have been more reference to the language, but answers often showed a personal response.

Question 3

Candidates wrote fairly well on the two poems 'An Unknown Girl' and 'Once Upon a Time'. There was some confusion over the setting for 'An Unknown Girl' and over the references to 'Miss India 1993'. However, some candidates of Asian heritage responded well to the idea of making a visit from Britain to India to discover more about their culture. Most answers had the gist of a sound response to 'Once Upon a Time', but often failed to explore all of the possibilities.

Question 4

Candidates revealed a reasonably sound understanding of 'The Barn' and often paired it with 'Death of a Naturalist'. There were, however, answers which were unbalanced or which focused on very selective use of evidence.

Questions 5 and 6

There were very few attempts at either of the questions on the 'Nature' selection.

Section B

Question 7

This question asked candidates to comment on the characters' attitudes to death in 'A Stench of Kerosene' and one other short story from the 'Different Cultures and Traditions' selection in the Edexcel Anthology. On the whole, candidates made an appropriate choice for a second story, but could have focused more specifically on the demands of the question, rather than simply narrating what happened. Some wrote on only one story, or wrote very few lines on the second. The candidates were aware of the way death is viewed but could have used more careful selection of evidence.

1204 3F

There were relatively few brief or incomplete answers. The reading passage was within the range of the candidates and the writing questions were answered reasonably well; most candidates wrote in some detail on each question. Answers to writing questions were often quite strong in content but much weaker in technical and grammatical command.

Section A

Question 1

More successful candidates answered the question directly and used the bullet points to structure and support their interpretations. Weaker candidates used the bullet points as separate questions/topics; such answers lacked focus on the actual question and often consisted of a series of short, poorly related mini-essays. Relatively few candidates were able to comment meaningfully on language. Some could “feature spot”, without much relevant analysis. Candidates who were able to relate language use to its effect on the reader scored more highly. There were some useful comments on the range of the language deployed in the piece and, very occasionally, on the self deprecating humour.

Section B

Question 2

The question appealed to many candidates, who had plenty to say and wrote some lively answers. Better answers were thoughtful and developed, with copious use of supporting evidence. Weaker answers were less developed and less obviously in favour of one side or the other.

Question 3

This was a popular question, which produced some good answers. Most candidates were in favour of homework but very critical of the variable quality of the tasks set. Most candidates showed an awareness of what was appropriate for this kind of letter in terms of style, tone and structure. Better answers used the bullet points to good effect, to develop and shape content. Less successful candidates used the bullet points too mechanically and as a tick list, not linking ideas clearly. Weaker candidates also gave their opinions rather than advice; better answers were more tailored to context and purpose.

Section C

Question 4

There were some thoughtful, often very personal answers to this question. Better answers commented in some detail on how the chosen problem was dealt with; the weakest wrote narratives, ignoring the triplet verb “to comment” altogether. Many candidates wrote about their current situation of re-taking GCSE English. Other times “when events did not run smoothly” included starting at a new school, missing flights, and finding that you were pregnant. Some took inspiration from the Section A passage and wrote about Media Studies projects that faltered.

Question 5

This was by far the more popular question in the section. Candidates answered at length and in different ways, some seriously and some in a more “tongue in cheek” way. There was a real focus on the triplet verb “to analyse”, as many candidates tried to balance the pros and cons of their chosen age. Overall there was also a lively grasp of the magazine context, though a few wasted time with graphics, including columns, pictures and notes on fonts for which marks cannot be given in an English examination. Technical weaknesses bedevilled answers; for instance, many rendered “perfect” (given in the question) as “prefect.”

1204 4H

Section A

Question 1

This was the most popular question attempted. However, it was also the most inconsistent, with a number of unbalanced responses. Most of these showed that candidates had problems with understanding 'Where the Scattering Began', which some seemed not to grasp at all. There was better coverage of 'Electricity Comes To Cocoa Bottom', with some analysis of the language examples quoted.

Question 2

Some candidates had difficulties in understanding 'The Darkling Thrush', but those who wrote well on the mood of sadness and uncertainty in the central characters chose interesting comparisons. 'Death of a Naturalist' and 'Lucozade' were two appropriate choices for the second poem.

Question 3

Candidates had to write on the importance of cultural background to the central characters in 'An Unknown Girl' and 'Still I Rise'. This was another question where candidates found it hard to achieve the right balance between the two poems and often wrote more on the first. Greater attention to planning would help to focus on key points from both poems. Candidates were aware of relevant ideas in 'Still I Rise' but often failed to include more than a few limited examples.

Question 4

This question was quite consistently answered. Some of the most confident responses were on the pairing of 'Digging' and 'Follower', with quite well-documented examples of the family relationships explored and analysis of language.

Questions 5 and 6 had no responses.

Section B

Question 7

Candidates were asked to write on 'Country Lovers' and one other short story from the 'Different Cultures and Traditions' selection from the Edexcel Anthology, focusing on the exploration of male and female attitudes towards marriage within the cultures described. The balancing of relevant details from both stories is a problem for some candidates who spend too long on the first story so that there are very few from the second. Greater familiarisation with the materials should enable speedier assembling of points.

Section C

Both questions had obviously engaged the candidates for they prompted a wealth of ideas. It is still important to stress, however, that sufficient time should be left to complete, and to proofread, this final question on the paper as one third of the marks are awarded for technical accuracy.

Question 8

Many candidates, in response to the question asking them for ideas for a new teenage magazine, gave thoughtful and imaginative suggestions, ranging from specialist topics such as video games to a unisex magazine, which may suggest a gap in the market. The letters were sometimes clearly structured but others contained ideas which would have benefited from being developed more fully.

Question 9

'What really annoys me!' generated very interesting and varied responses. One candidate, unusually, wrote: 'That's a good question' and reeled off a long list of things found annoying. Candidates vented their feelings about everything from government issues to people who fiddle with their hair. Several were annoyed at having to resit English, and a very amusing response came from a candidate who had been late for the summer examination because on his 60-kilometre drive to school by motorbike taxi he had been stuck behind a pig lorry.

1204 5H

There were significantly fewer candidates entered for the Higher than for the Foundation Tier. Though it is difficult to generalise, the overall standard of answer was mediocre. Many candidates, whose hopes of success could barely have extended beyond a modest C grade, might have benefited from being entered for Foundation Tier.

Section A

Question 1

Candidates were engaged by the passage and wrote clearly about it, particularly in their comments on the writer's moral dilemma about seal hunting and eating. Most showed understanding of both the meaning of the passage and the question, but many used the bullet points as sub-questions, and did not relate their comments on them to the actual question itself. Candidates showed limited awareness of language; most tended to "feature spot" with little extended or effective evaluation or analysis.

Section B

Question 2

Few candidates attempted this question, which derived from the content of the passage used in question 1. The level of argument was often poor; some answers were brief, others muddled, and often expressive of feeling rather than reason. Answers were also limited by technical and grammatical mistakes.

Question 3

These answers were better developed, perhaps because the candidates felt more personally involved in the topic. Argument was balanced, points were verbally linked and evidence was given in support of opinion. Overall, however, answers were not fully developed.

Section C

Question 4

The few candidates who answered this question wrote appropriately and made some attempt to analyse their thoughts and feelings. The places chosen for their significant changes ranged from the predictable (school) to the fanciful (Mars).

Question 5

As with the companion question in 3F, this produced some engaging answers. There was some variety of approach, including the pragmatic and the philosophical. The liveliness of the ideas, however, was often at variance with the quality of the expression, which was typically weak.

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