

# Examiners' Report Summer 2007

GCSE

## GCSE English B (1204)

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Summer 2007

Publications Code 019113

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# Introduction

## 1204/2F and 1204/4H

This is the third year when 'clean' anthologies were used in the examination rather than an annotated copy. This has now become accepted into the system, and no specific comment is needed, except to confirm that the change has had beneficial effects on the approaches adopted by centres and candidates.

Generally, the papers have worked very well in enabling candidates to make a response to both the Reading and the Writing questions. Mostly, candidates understood the demands of the question and there were few basic misinterpretations. Centres are working hard to ensure that candidates do comment on language when answering Reading questions, and that they quote examples and support them. Most candidates did attempt to consider linguistic devices. There are still some (more so on Paper 2F) who do not go beyond general comment, however, or who struggle to comment on such features as imagery. This is a key differentiator. At the top end of Paper 4H, there were some outstanding responses, well above what would be expected within GCSE levels. Examiners' reports comment on much sensitive response to the Writing tasks set.

Themes from previous years remain stubbornly persistent, and it is to be hoped that centres will note that, if candidates paid greater attention to these basic elements, they really could improve their performance significantly. This is particularly the case where, in Section A, candidates wrote on only one poem rather than two or had very uneven coverage. Such errors may result from a failure to read the rubric carefully: questions will **always** require treatment of two poems. One examiner commented on the fact that some responses were "more like two separate exercises than a single, integrated answer". Response should be equally balanced between the two poems, whether the second is named or is one of their own choosing. A simple plan covering both poems, is a good way of ensuring that they do not simply forget that they are asked to write on two poems, as sometimes seems to happen. On this specification (1204), a similar issue arises with Section B, where coverage of two stories on different cultures and traditions is required.

There remains widespread confusion over the difference between poems, plays and stories, with candidates frequently mixing the terms appropriate to each genre, such as 'stanza' and 'paragraph' and 'poem' for 'prose'.

Centres should continue to stress to candidates the importance of clear handwriting which is not too small and which is in black, preferably, or blue-black ink. The actual quality of handwriting in some instances is such as to make responses virtually illegible.

The importance, especially for Writing questions, of checking work carefully for technical accuracy is stressed annually. Some candidates have acquired the skill of leaving sufficient time to look over their writing and make improvements, but many do not undertake this valuable process at all.

## 1204/3F and 1204/5H

The demands of both question papers were comparable with last year. In some ways the text used for Q1 in the Higher Tier was more challenging, but perhaps more stimulating. Answers were thorough and addressed all the bullet points including the one referring to the use of language; indeed, comments on the latter showed some improvement.

The writing questions were accessible, though it was interesting that those which were arguably the more challenging in each section - Q3 and Q4 - proved the more popular. The writing for section C in the Higher Paper was particularly pleasing. In general candidates were able to express themselves relevantly and competently, within effective whole text structures. As with 1203 writing responses, the main weaknesses included the intrusion of text forms and the inappropriate use of bullet point formats. A few candidates also used 'minor' expletives as though this were an acceptable method of emphasis in formal writing.

Experts and statistics are freely quoted to support arguments; this can be an effective technique, but when the expert is clearly bogus and the statistics patently absurd, it detracts from a serious argument. To be told that "65% of children who are smacked at home go on later to be excluded from school for bullying" (Q2, Foundation Tier) undermines logic rather than bolsters it.

Clear handwriting has always been an advantage in examinations. Examiners take great care to mark each answer with equal thoroughness, but candidates who write in a spidery scrawl, which makes little distinction between individual letters, except by barely perceptible squiggles, or who write entirely in upper case letters, are doing themselves few favours.

Overall, however, there was a sense that answers to both reading and writing questions were more focused and purposeful, perhaps because of the wider range of resources now available to support the specifications.

## 1204/1A Speaking and Listening

Centres continue to maintain a high degree of accuracy and consistency in the assessment of oral work and there is very little to add to previous reports.

A programme of Training and Advisory Visits took place last autumn and a number of Moderation Visits, with centres selected on a random basis, in the spring.

The experience of these visits confirmed that most centres use the marking grids with confidence and a considerable degree of accuracy. The quality of record keeping is variable, but, again, the centres which have clear, easily referenced systems are in the majority. The candidates seen on the visits are invariably at ease with oral work and, in particular, are good at inter active group work.

There are some concerns about over assessment. Whilst centre marking on the visits is usually realistic, there is some inflation of marks when the final mark is submitted. This is explicable in terms of context; the visits impose pressures on candidates, whereas teachers can (quite appropriately) choose when to assess candidates and when not to, and also tailor tasks for individual candidates.

Typically for all examination boards, speaking and listening marks are higher than for other components in the examination. It is arguable that this reflects the fact that most teenagers are more skilled in speech than writing. However it is important that centre marking does not become over generous and that grade drift, which has not been a problem in the past, does not occur.





## 1204/1B Reading and Writing (Written Coursework)

This component is so well established there is little to add to previous reports.

Centre assessment remained very sound, and, in the vast majority of cases, within acceptable limits. Assessment Support Meetings, which centres are required to attend, are held each autumn to standardise coursework assessment, with the help of a booklet of exemplar folders, and this process has clearly helped to ensure consistency of marking over the years.

There were fewer adverse comments from moderators this year about centre administration. There was a particular improvement in the submission of Coursework Authentication Sheets. Centres are also reminded that they should include the top and bottom folders in the sample, if these candidates are not included on the requested list. There were still incomplete or inaccurate topsheets, a seemingly endemic problem, which poses a potentially serious risk for centres as mistakes might trigger centre wide adjustments.

As frequently noted in the recent past, folders were more remarkable for their solid worthiness than their flair. Plagiarism remains a pervasive issue. The evidence of the folders suggests that centres take this very seriously and impose whatever controls they can to ensure student work is authentic. Teacher annotation is usually clear and explicit and there are frequent indications of careful internal moderation procedures. Some doubts inevitably remain. One way of avoiding problems of this kind is by task setting which is tailored to individual groups or students; in this way it would be very difficult for candidates to use downloaded generic essays. Some Centres still use titles across year groups and repeat them year after year, a process which can discourage fresh approaches.

Many folders are word processed and benefit from this. Centres must encourage candidates to spell check their work as mistakes often subvert intended meanings. Centres must continue to correct and comment on errors.

In the 1204 examination papers this year there was a question about the advantages and disadvantages of coursework. It was interesting to note that the majority of candidates were in favour of coursework, despite reservations. They felt it was productive in many ways and they emphasised the amount of hard work that went into the production of their coursework portfolios. Overall the coursework folders validated these comments; they were impressive in terms of their presentation, thoroughness and appropriateness and bore eloquent testimony to the conscientious hard work of candidates and the professionalism of their teachers.

### Personal and Imaginative Unit

A familiar mixture of autobiographical writing, empathetic responses and story telling was submitted and the overall standard remained high. "The Assassin" again figured frequently as a title. This facilitated candidates to write in their own voice but within a very limiting framework, which allowed them to create and maintain a (sometimes sickeningly violent) atmosphere, but provided few opportunities for character or plot development. Occasionally there was a sense that units were awarded marks on the basis of quantity rather than quality and centres were particularly inclined to over reward on the second marking grid; some work, which was riddled with spelling, punctuation and grammar mistakes, was awarded incomprehensibly high marks.

## 1204 Media Texts

Many candidates submitted work based on the comparison of advertisements of the front pages of newspapers. Some centres thoughtfully included copies of the texts used. The quality of the analysis often depended on the textual and graphical richness of the material chosen. Increasing numbers of candidates are submitting work on the moving image. Much of this work is worthy, but lacking in personal engagement and often heavily reliant on teacher notes. Given the rich field media material which is available to candidates, it is disappointing that so many responses are mundane and lacking in personal engagement.

## Shakespeare

Most work was based on 'Romeo and Juliet' and 'Macbeth' and the comments made about the uniformity of tasks in connection with the 'Diverse Cultures' unit apply here also. The quality of work was very mixed. Weaknesses included an over reliance on teacher notes and a tendency to similar phrasing and the use of the same quotations. There were also notable strengths; some centres specialise in certain plays (for example 'Othello' and 'The Tempest') and tailor tasks very effectively to their candidates' abilities. Similar good practice is sometimes reflected in assignments which are based on a single aspect of the text, but allow for expansion to cover the whole play.

# 1204/2F The Craft of the Writer

## Section A

All of the poetry questions worked well, but *Nature* remains by far the least often section selected. Candidates respond to the poems, often quite well, but do not always focus sharply enough on the specific demands of the question. The failure to deal adequately, or at all, with two poems is particularly marked in some responses on this paper, and seriously affects the outcome for candidates. Not all deal directly with the language of the poets, and weaker answers often fail to quote from or comment on examples from the poems. There is some tendency, in a minority of scripts, to take metaphorical language literally, which can lead to serious misunderstanding.

### Q1

This was the more frequently answered question from *In Such a Time as This*: it asked candidates to comment on *Hide and Seek* and *Electricity Comes to Cocoa Bottom*. Most understood the basic situation and sequence of events in *Hide and Seek*, although some misinterpreted the location of the different children or misunderstood the dénouement, not realising the child was left alone at the end. At all levels of ability there was a personal response, for example in the comment: "Although you feel sorry for the little boy, you also understand that his friends are children too and they must have got very bored because it's no fun when you're the seeker". Some referred successfully to the personification of nature, and many picked up on visual and sound images to some degree, commenting also on the urgency and excitement conveyed. Many identified the early simile and the use of personification. *Electricity comes to Cocoa Bottom* elicited more varied, and often more cursory, responses, with not all candidates clear what the children were waiting for, or misinterpreting 'the moment had passed' to mean that the children had missed seeing the lights turned on. Some did not refer to the electricity, apart from in the title, appearing to think that the awaited event was the sunset. In some answers, there was little comment on the many striking images in the poem, and there was apparently widespread ignorance of the location of the poem's setting.

### Q2

There were far fewer responses on *Refugee Blues* and one other selected poem, for which a common choice was *You Will Be Hearing From Us Shortly*. There was in general a sound level of interpretation of the circumstances in which the characters were subject to victimisation and prejudice, with fair comments on both the explicit and implicit cruelty. Some were clearly outraged or incensed that anyone should be treated in such ways: for example, "That makes the Jews sound like thieves and poor, unwanted people, and it's not nice to hear people talking about you like that". On *Refugee Blues* there was a large number of well-focused answers, with a personal response and sound coverage of the imagery. Some used historical background information well; others floundered, insecure on the period and issues. While many responses on the second poem were also sound, coverage was generally less good, and on *You'll Be Hearing From Us Shortly* there were examples of misunderstanding about who was speaking the brief comments, with a number thinking that these 'asides' were actually the interviewee's responses.

### Q3

There was a very even split between this question (*Not My Best Side* and *Warning*) and the other in *Identity*. There were a few candidates who did not distinguish the three characters in *Not My Best Side* effectively and were confused about the identity of the speaker, especially in the first stanza, but the majority were able to make sound points about the characterisation, noting the oddity of a speaking dragon, an unmaidenly maid and a 'brash techno-geek' of a knight. The words of the characters were often analysed in a successful way, with candidates often showing signs of enjoying the humour and quirky details, realising that the girl's attraction to the dragon was, to say the least, 'unusual', and occasionally exploring themes such as vanity: "the dragon does not care about being slain, he just cares about how he looks". Because some wrote at great length on the first poem, there was often too little on *Warning*. Here, some candidates offered in effect only a summary of the poem, with little response to the images or to the spirited thoughts and wishes of the narrator.

### Q4

Around half of the candidates answering on *Identity* attempted this question, on *Follower* and one other poem. The second poem selected was usually *Digging*, and for many candidates this worked well, enabling them to make connections on Seamus Heaney's childhood. In a minority of cases, the similarity of themes meant that the focus became blurred, without sufficient identification of the language of each poem. More often, however, candidates responded with some appropriate attention to such phrases as 'globed shoulders'. Many understood the reversal of roles at the end of *Follower*. There were some misunderstandings based on insecure grasp of the nature of farming, although others handled the technical detail well. Successful choices of a second poem included *Death of a Naturalist* or *Old Man, Old Man*. Where a poem such as *Mirror* or *Miracle on St David's Day* was selected, candidates often struggled to relate this to the question's requirements.

### Q5

It was still a comparatively small number of candidates who responded on *Nature*. Twice as many of these answered this question, on *Thistles* and *Trout*, as attempted Q6. These were both short poems, with very compressed language which many candidates found hard to comment on effectively, although some picked out key words appropriately and commented effectively on some images in *Trout*, as well as noting the military language of *Thistles*: "'Stiff with weapons" suggests how the thistles stand tall and even when they are mown down they manage to keep their ground "fighting back".'

### Q6

A minority choice, this question asked candidates to write on *Wind* and one other poem. There were examples where candidates interpreted metaphors literally, thinking, for example, that the house had actually been 'blown out to sea'. Some appreciated the physical and tactile nature of the descriptions in *Wind*. The most common choice for the second poem was *The Storm*.

## Section B

### Q7

Q7, on 'Veronica' and one other story, focused on the differences in the lives of men and women, and the question generally elicited reasonable understanding. Many candidates writing about *Veronica* appreciated that women in her society faced a very different life from men, commenting, for example, on 'the inequality between man and woman' and on the 'lack of good access to education'. They could often back their points with relevant quotations, making the contrast with the educated and financially successful Okeke (although a small minority thought Okeke was also a woman, or that he was a white South African, because of mixing up this story with *Country Lovers*). Good responses discussed Veronica's "fatalistic attitude" and the significance of the stream and the twig snapped by Okeke. There was some tendency for weaker candidates to narrate details from one or both stories or to write very briefly on a limited number of points. For some candidates there were issues over timing. They found it difficult to write a balanced consideration of both the stories they selected (common choices being *A Stench of Kerosene* and *Country Lovers*), which resulted in insufficient coverage of the second story. One examiner noted that some responses dealt with only one story, and there was a minority where no answer at all was submitted on this question. Some candidates chose a story on which they found it difficult to explore the precise focus of the question (for example, *The Gold Cadillac* - although in fact this story would have given plenty of scope to discuss the place of the women in the family and their influence on events, especially the very strong portrayal of Dee, the mother).

## Section C

### Q8

In Section C, somewhat more candidates answered on this question, on how to live a long and happy life, with many candidates focusing on the importance of health-related issues. They often showed considerable knowledge, including relevant scientific information at times, on the vocabulary and principles of dieting and fitness régimes. One candidate wrote, for example: "Never get surgery for your weight. You can do it yourself." There were many warnings on the dangers of smoking, drugs and alcohol, in contrast to the attitudes of teenagers which are commonly presented. Many referred also to the importance of successful relationships in achieving happiness and mixing with the 'right' kind of friends. The best responses adopted a lively magazine style and showed control of tone, as in the following comment: "Want to live a long, happy life? If your answer is yes, then I have the solution for you." A growing weakness, it seems, is for candidates to lapse into bullet point lists, often not in sentence form. **Centres should note the importance of continuous prose in connected sentences.**

### Q9

For this question, on 'A lonely person', some wrote in imaginative detail and included moving observations. Many set out their response in a suitable way, using an appropriate register and drawing effectively on personal experience or real life situations. There were a few very perceptive responses which examined the nature of loneliness: "she dreads her alarm clock going off in the morning. As it goes off she wakes up, barely ready for another day of life." Some portrayed well their engagement with characters, who sometimes turned out to be themselves: "This girl

was me, but I've conquered that now." The bullet points were generally found helpful in structuring a response. Most commonly, candidates chose to write either about a tramp or down-and-out person, or about a social isolate in a school context. In some accounts, there was evident sympathy for the person described, with candidates giving vivid descriptions of the living conditions of those rejected by society and expressing their desire to offer help. Some candidates had not planned sufficiently and, having started to write about a lonely person, ran out of steam quickly. Others used the question as a springboard for a story very loosely connected with the theme of loneliness.

Common weaknesses in candidates' writing remain: poor structure and inadequate paragraphing; lack of clearly written and punctuated sentences; frequent errors of spelling such as over single or double consonants, homophones and 'phonetic' spelling.

# 1204/3F Unprepared Non-Fiction

## Section A

### Q1

The passage for the reading question proved accessible to the vast majority of candidates both in terms of content and style; many found the content appealing. Answers tended to be more focused than last year.

The question worked well. Comment on all the bullet points was relevant and, in stronger answers, developed. The first two were very straightforward and most candidates identified the key features which drew the reader's interest. The drama of the incident was more often recounted than its presentation analysed. The last two bullet points were the key discriminators, the more successful candidates showing an ability to reflect on the various perspectives (narrator as child and adult, Kathleen) which made it puzzling. The most challenging aspect of the text at this level is its style; most candidates were able to make points about the writer's use of language, and better answers evaluated the effectiveness of the more obvious aspects of this, for instance the use of language appropriate to a child's perception and the use of simile. There was, however, a lot of feature spotting.

Most responses used the bullet points to develop answers; many candidates regarded these as sub questions, writing paragraphs on each. If candidates do this, it is important that the main question itself is addressed in each section of the answer; otherwise, as happened in some weaker responses, answers become descriptive or narrative in approach.

## Section B

In Section B both questions proved almost equally popular. There were strong responses, often personally engaged and generally well argued, to both questions. The bullet point format of both questions helped candidates; each point was addressed in some detail, but, as with question 1, there was some loss of overall structure and focus, when each bullet point was considered individually and separately as a sub question.

### Q2

The advice was detailed and based on personal experience. Most adopted an appropriate tone and style for an adult audience, but some used an inappropriately informal register, occasionally even descending to expletives. Comment was almost uniformly sensible and often thoughtful, and, to an extent, informed by awareness of the material on this topic in the Edexcel Anthology. Most felt that discipline should be constructive not punitive, and stressed the importance of communication. Opinion was divided on smacking; those in favour felt it was a simple and effective way of making a point and, in some instances, protecting a child from danger. Others pointed to the long term effects of violence and argued that you were teaching a child to seek solutions in violence. Much helpful advice was given on alternatives - banishment to the stairs, withdrawal of treats and so on.

### Q3

Much of the comment on the companion question in the Higher Tier Paper also applies here. Candidates at this level were also more in favour of coursework than against it. Answers were often characterised by length and detail, but not by clarity of structure. This was often the result of using the bullet points as paragraph headings. Thus whilst the arguments for and against were made clearly within sections, there was a loss of central focus and direction in the answer. The more successful answers linked points and used language persuasively in support of one side of the argument, whilst weaker responses tended to rehearse points.

## Section C

### Q4

This question produced some thoughtful answers, influenced by the text used for Q1. Weaker responses tended to be those that focused entirely on recounting the incident or experience. More successful were those which provided a clear focus on the lesson that had been learnt.

### Q5

Q5 worked well for most candidates, who evaluated local facilities, especially sport and transport, with some clarity and, occasionally, venom. It was important in this question to consider the strengths and weaknesses of local facilities, and most tried to do this. A few, however, misinterpreted the question and analysed the advantages and disadvantages of carrying out a review, rather than the quality of local services. As the focus of assessment in this question was the clarity of the analysis, an answer which adopted this approach could be marked with an allowance made for the candidate's reading of the question.



# 1204/4H The Craft of the Writer

## Section A

This Section produced much excellent writing. Many candidates responded maturely to the poems and engaged thoughtfully with the texts. Their sensitivity of analysis was often impressive. There were often very good attempts to show how the poets' use of language enhanced the meaning of the poems. Even less strong candidates were usually able to pick out some conscious poetic devices, such as alliteration, and offer examples. This suggested that teaching has often been successful in encouraging such comment. Examiners also noted that there was now far less evidence of a single "teacher's voice", partly because of the use of plain texts, although occasionally a prepared response missed the particular point of the question.

A weakness in some responses was that candidates laboriously told the examiner how many stanzas (commonly referred to as 'paragraphs') there were and what the rhyming or metrical scheme was, but did not analyse this information at all, in terms of its contribution to the poem's purpose and effects. This was sometimes allied with other forms of 'feature spotting' by just naming linguistic devices or failing to show their effect convincingly: one candidate wrote "enjambement is used to keep the reader interested", for example. Occasionally, candidates used clichés such as that the language was "simple and straightforward" (often when it was anything but) or that a device "is used to make the poem flow". Centres should continue to encourage their students to think about the *how* of poetic writing.

## Q1

For *In Such a Time as This*, by far the majority of candidates answered this question, on *Lucozade* and *Death in Leamington*. Many demonstrated a good grasp and offered sensitive and detailed comparisons of the way in which each poet handled their subjects. For example, they noted the far greater impersonality of the description of the nurse and the old woman, compared with the mother and daughter relationship: "This detached view is also brought out in the third person format, being more descriptive of the events rather than the emotion of *Lucozade*, and is seen as much more routine for the Nurse." They were mostly able in addition to pick out features of negative language. There were signs of misunderstanding on the part of some candidates about the events and context. Relatively common was the interpretation of *Death in Leamington* as a murder story, with candidates taking the reference to turning down the gas as evidence that the nurse had killed the woman. Others were unaware that the woman was dead when the nurse arrived, or assumed that the poem was set in a nursing home. On *Lucozade*, many candidates dealt well with Kay's imagery ('orange nostalgia', for example, or the 'sad chrysanthemums'), although occasionally this was found slightly baffling. Interpretations of the outcome varied - in this case more defensibly, since there is greater ambiguity in the poet's writing. Not all candidates noticed or responded to the second part of the question, about the effects of the events on those visiting. Weaker responses were often rather too narrative.

## Q2

A smaller number answered on *The Send-off* and one other poem, but responses were mostly thoughtful, perceptive and personal. On *The Send-off*, candidates generally found the language accessible: they often noted and appreciated the conspiratorial

feeling behind the nodding signals and the winking lamp. Many also picked out the oxymoron 'grimly gay', and often they were able to explain and develop the point made here, although occasionally they thought the soldiers were really happy despite their grim looks: 'gaily grim', perhaps. A large number successfully chose as their second poem *Dulce et Decorum Est* by the same poet, looking closely at the detail of Owen's language, and showing the strength of emotion with its more blatant anger and passion and anti-propaganda stance. There were also some excellent evaluations which focused on the contrasting attitudes in *from War Music*. The focus on 'contrasting emotions' was handled with varying success: some looked at contrasts **within** each poem; others picked out contrasts **between** their two poems: either approach was acceptable. Less successful responses failed to pick up on the keyword 'contrasting'. Several candidates wrote well about the very different emotions conveyed in *An Unknown Girl*, *The Darkling Thrush* (with its contrast between hope and despair) or *Refugee Blues*. Weaker candidates did not fully justify their choice of second poem (for example, *Warning*) and wrote about it in only very general terms.

### Q3

**Identity** was the most frequently answered poetry section, and within this Q3 was answered by the considerable majority of candidates (it was the most answered question in Section A). This was on *Mirror* and *Old Man, Old Man*, and most candidates were able to make worthwhile observations on the way in which the ageing process is dealt with. It produced some outstandingly penetrating analyses and sensitive responses, original and thought-provoking and making pertinent points about language, narrative voice and authorial intent; but it also generated a minority of the least successful answers, which failed to grasp the central point of the poems and were cursory and superficial in consequence. A number of candidates engaged strongly with the tone and imagery of the poems. For example, one candidate wrote of the 'lake' as being "Deep and unknown, reflecting, maybe, the state of mind Plath is in". One examiner noted that they often 'recognised that there was something more than plain "sadness" at growing old in *Mirror* and that the sympathy for her father in *Old Man, Old Man* is slightly twisted by the underlying bitterness in such phrases as "World authority on twelve different sorts of glue". Some noted the difference between the focus on losing one's looks and losing one's power and mind. Weaker candidates showed some confusion over the voice in *Mirror*, sometimes thinking that the words were those of the woman herself and that "silver and exact" referred to her grey hair. Those who interpreted the poem too literally referred to an actual lake, somehow connected with the events of the author's life. Although some wrote very perceptively on the situation portrayed in *Old Man, Old Man*, others lost focus and wrote more about what they saw to be the relationship between the old man and the writer than about concerns over growing old. Some examiners noted a moralising tendency, as shown by the comment "*Old Man, Old Man* shows you should not be afraid of growing old because there will always be someone there to help you".

### Q4

This was on *The Barn* and one other poem. There were some very positive responses from candidates on this question. By far the most common pairing was with *Death of a Naturalist* (also by Heaney), which elicited many intelligent responses and analyses of language in both poems, as well as allowing candidates to evoke a sense of place and feelings, as well as exploring how these changed as the poem progressed. The opportunity to write about two poems by the same writer was clearly appreciated by some. Candidates often seemed to enjoy recognising the use of warlike imagery and

vocabulary in the poems. One commented on the “cacophonous alliteration of coarse croaking’.” There was often a pleasing appreciation of how such images as “cobwebs clogging up your lungs” actually work. Other choices for comparison included *An Unknown Girl*, where candidates were able to focus on the intense imagery used to create a sense of place, *Mid-Term Break* and *Still I Rise* - with occasional responses, of good quality, on *Miracle on St David’s Day*.

#### Q5

**Nature** was again a minority option, with responses split evenly between this question, on *Break of Day in the Trenches* and *A Blade of Grass* (which was interpreted imaginatively by some candidates, with developed personal responses), and Question 6. Many engaged quite thoughtfully with the ideas behind the poets’ use of natural objects. In writing about *A Blade of Grass*, for example, one candidate wrote: “The blade of grass represents his affection for his partner, showing how something so small and worthless can mean something so huge”. Most candidates selected an appropriate natural object (for example, the rat or the poppy in *Break of Day in the Trenches*); many noted that the rat was oblivious to the horrors of war. Weaker candidates often struggled with the ideas in *A Blade of Grass*, unable to relate closely to the poet’s message and sometimes simply agreeing that a blade of grass really was a rather bizarre gift.

#### Q6

This question was on *The Stag* and one other poem. The most popular choices were *Roe-Deer* (easily the most common, and offering good potential for exploring links and contrasts), *Iguana Memory* and *The Horses*, with some also choosing *Trout*. The question produced some thoughtful and perceptive analysis and comment, with plenty of references to language and its effects. There were well-considered ideas on the relationships between humans and animals that were developed from the ‘meetings’. One very able candidate who chose *Roe-Deer* for the second poem wrote: “In both poems, emphasis on the importance of the meeting is shown by making the divide between the worlds clear, as if to suggest that any collision between the two is extremely significant, as well as unusual.” In *The Stag*, many candidates dealt well with the predicament of the stag and noted the creature’s journey from his own domain (“his favourite valley”) to the alien “strange country” of humans. Those writing also on *Roe-Deer* were able to offer clear contrasts in the reactions, intentions and interpretations of the meetings. One examiner noted that on this pair of poems candidates often “made close reference to language and structure to compare the crass indifference and brutality of the people towards the stag with the magical sense of wonder in connection with the roe-deer”.

### Section B

#### Q7

Candidates often wrote with a strong personal response to the women in *Veronica* and *A Stench of Kerosene*. Most demonstrated a sound or good knowledge of the texts and could draw from them key arguments on how cultural and family traditions contributed to the deaths of Veronica and Guleri. They often commented on the different experiences of the two women, as well as noting similarities in their inferior status. In writing about *Veronica*, better candidates were able to show the range of influences on the central character, including the apathy or ‘fatalism’ which her circumstances had engendered. One candidate, for example, wrote: “The views

of society help her, if not force her, to accept the inevitability of her situation and because she adheres to them, she does not question them." On *A Stench of Kerosene*, many not only noted that tradition had a profound effect on Guleri, the obvious 'victim', but also that Manak's mother, the perpetrator, was herself in a way the victim of her society's traditions. On this story, there was some strong personal response, with a grasp of cultural traditions. Weaker responses failed to grasp the geographical locations, sometimes confusing them with the South African setting of *Country Lovers*. Many gave good examples from the text, but not all: one examiner wrote that "a number failed to follow the **point-quote-comment** advice so often offered and did not score as highly as they might because they did not illustrate their arguments with quotations". There were problems with timing and coverage for some number of candidates, sometimes because of spending too long on the first story, with a lack of planning often in evidence.

## Section C

As in previous years, this Section produces some of the best answers from many candidates, who responded to the tasks with real interest. One examiner said that there were some “stunning responses”. Outstanding essays were particularly marked on Question 8, which perhaps illustrates that it is not always the more obviously accessible question that generates the most subtle response.

### Q8

Responses to this question, on the memories evoked by a photograph, were written enthusiastically by candidates at all levels of ability. This resulted in many answers which were lively, engaging and at times very personal. Often, the writing was detailed, with minute description, clear and accurate. A good example of an effective opening is the following: “The photograph sits in a silver frame, gilding my happy memory... It evokes in me memories of summer, smells and sounds, lost but for the images left behind in frames or boxes.” Some candidates used a real photograph, while others drew on their imagination, sometimes adopting a persona effectively (a grandma, a war veteran, a teacher) to conjure vivid pictures. Common subjects were holiday or family snaps, which brought back childhood memories, together with pictures of deceased relatives or those now ‘lost’ through divorce or migration, as well as whole class or school photos. There were also responses which treated more unusual subjects. One examiner was struck by an account of an accidental picture of a door handle, which then examined events from the point of view of the door: ‘Why do I get slammed when she shouts?’. Another commented on ‘a photo of the Earth from space, a Vietnam war photo and a photo of a fire, taken from a mobile phone’. Examiners noted that some responses were so skilful and evocative that it was hard to tell whether they were real or imagined - either approach, of course, was fully acceptable, nor did it matter whether the examiner could tell. Where responses were less effective, it was largely because they resulted either in minute description of detail without elaboration of context or because the writer (and hence the reader) literally lost sight of the photograph and slipped into only vaguely linked reminiscences.

### Q9

Q9, on applying for a reality TV programme, inspired many candidates, who were obviously writing about something many of them would love to do, presenting themselves as perfect ‘wannabes’, either because they are or because they entered successfully into the spirit of the task. The letter form was adopted with consistency: candidates wrote as though they had a real addressee in mind, which created a strong sense of register and focus. Many gave lively, if often plainly tongue-in-cheek, explanations as to why they would be the ideal contestant, with explanations of their myriad talents and how being on the programme would benefit them or the other people on the show. Adopting a clearly different persona - such as a middle-aged woman - often helped the writer towards an imaginative response. Examiners noted the universal confidence candidates evinced that their inclusion would have phenomenally positive effects on audience ratings. Weaker candidates were sometimes more pedestrian in their approach to the letter. They may have asserted their ‘bubbly’ nature, but often they failed to communicate this through what they wrote. Examiners were pleased, by those responses which contained an evident sense of irony and demonstrated ‘a healthy disregard or cynicism for the whole notion of instant celebrity’.

As with Paper 2F, weaknesses in candidates' writing sometimes remain: poor structure and inadequate paragraphing; lack of clearly written and punctuated sentences; frequent errors of spelling such as over single or double consonants, homophones and 'phonetic' spelling.

# 1204/5H Unprepared Non-Fiction

## Section A

### Q1

The passage was quite a challenging one, but a glossary was provided for the more difficult words, and the candidates' responses showed that they not only understood it but many were stimulated by it. The vast majority made relevant comments on the first three bullet points. The description of the isolated setting led to some interesting analysis (mainly focused on the adjectives). Stronger candidates were able to explore both the history (especially the captain's story) and associations of the house, and the rich profusion of its contents. The atmosphere suggested also provided a rich field for comment, much centred on the mythological allusions and the exotic details (for instance "the eerie woodcuts") in the setting. In particular the "sadness that was also the springboard for joy" led to some excellent interpretative comments. Zofia and her relationship to the writer also produced some thoughtful interpretation; less successful answers saw it in terms of romantic love, whereas stronger answers evaluated it as from the narrator's perspective as a child. For abler candidates the details and language of the text provided a rich field for comment and there was some excellent linguistic analysis; the use of language is being handled with increasing confidence by candidates. The glossary (necessarily extensive for this passage) was intended solely to facilitate understanding; some candidates wasted time by quoting parts of it in their answers and even incorporated comments on it (especially the monkey-tree explanation) in their answers.

## Section B

### Q2

This was a less popular choice of question in this section. Those who answered it, however, did so with some clarity and sense of audience. Many took 'holiday' to mean going away from home, for instance a two week break at the seaside in England or abroad. In some ways, however, the most successful answers approached it from the angle of what to do throughout the school summer holidays and these came up with detailed and useful suggestions about how the time could be profitably spent. Overall there were some interesting observations on places, parents, jobs and money, as well as energetic (if rather less convincing) recommendations not to forget one's studies.

### Q3

Q3 was most candidates' choice of question in this section. There was, unsurprisingly, a personal edge to responses, many candidates commenting on levels of stress. For most, however, coursework was a good idea, though there were reservations. A few candidates, a curious mixture of the least and the most able, were very hostile. Arguments in favour of coursework included points about spreading the workload, relieving the dangers of depending on a single examination, the morale boosting effect of having a good coursework mark "banked" before entering the examination room and its key role in subjects like Art and P.E. Arguments against included the possibility of outside help, websites offering pre-written essays, lesson time being absorbed by writing coursework and demands made on student time. It was interesting that many students commented on the ways in which their teachers warned them about the dangers of plagiarism (spelt in a myriad

of ways); little evidence emerged of acceptance, either tacit or overt, among candidates that coursework was, overall, “a charter for cheats” - in fact many resented the ways in which their hard work was discounted by commentators. Whilst some responses were superficial and assertive, most candidates argued with a pleasing degree of logic, laced with personal experience and expert opinion and statistics (sometimes these were less than convincing), often balancing points before expressing an overall conclusion which accepted or rejected the idea. Weaker candidates might have benefited from the bullet point structure used for the same question in Foundation Tier. Answers, however, were generally more sharply structured than those in the Foundation Tier.

## Section C

### Q4

This was, perhaps unpredictably, the preferred question in this section; answers were personally engaged throughout the range. The responses to the question showed that candidates at this level are able “to think on their feet” and respond effectively to a challenging and somewhat unusual concept. The spontaneity of much comment was in contrast to the solid worthiness of many answers to Q3. A surprising number (though not a majority) favoured home education; candidates cited reasons which included convenience and congeniality, but many also wrote disturbingly about bullying, violence and indiscipline in schools. Reasons against mainly centred on the distractions of home (T.V. and computer games), the lack of social contact and of facilities, particularly sports and science equipment. Some assumed home-schooling meant that parents taught all the subjects, but others were clearly aware of the home learning resources available on the internet. At least one candidate had experienced both home and school education and preferred the latter only on social grounds. It was pleasing that most candidates showed they were able to write a review, often skilfully arguing and balancing the pros and cons, as the question required, and retaining a degree of objectivity, whilst expressing a personal opinion.

### Q5

Answers to this question built on the experience of reading and analysing the text used for Q1. This was particularly evident in the way candidates wrote from the perspective of early childhood and in the detailed attention given to the senses. Candidates wrote evocatively, often movingly and sometimes wittily, about a “special” house or building of their experience, more often than not their own home or that of a loved relative, usually a grandparent. Most candidates were able to write about and identify the special features and importance of the chosen building, but the most successful responses were those which addressed the second part of the question and conveyed its significance either by a pervasive implicit relevance or an additional commentary.



## Statistics for GCSE English 1204

### Option 1: Paper 1A, 1B, 2F, 3F

Grade	Max. Mark	C	D	E	F	G
Boundary Mark	100	54	43	32	21	10

### Option 2: Paper 1A, 1B, 4H, 5H

Grade	Max. Mark	A*	A	B	C	D	E
Boundary Mark	100	85	74	63	53	42	36

### Notes

**Boundary Mark:** the minimum mark required by a candidate to qualify for a given grade.

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