

Examiners' Report Summer 2008

GCSE

GCSE English (1204)

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1204 1B

1B (Written Coursework)

The external moderation process again worked very smoothly this year. Candidates are well prepared for this component and their overall performance remains consistent with that of candidates in previous years.

Most assessment was within acceptable limits and on a par with that of previous years; few centre adjustments were likely to be needed. Many moderators commented on evidence which showed that centres had conducted careful internal moderation procedures. There were occasional problems with centres, whose candidature is restricted in range of ability and who sometimes struggled to assess candidates, falling outside their normal range, at an appropriate level.

Centres are now well used to designing tasks which address the specification requirements and the assessment objectives. There were virtually no problems. The price paid for this tends to be a conservative approach to both texts and topics for reading units; 'Of Mice and Men' and 'Romeo and Juliet' as ever predominate, with the almost inevitable focus being, respectively, on 'The American Dream' and the character of Juliet. There were some individual issues with units that are addressed in the specific comments which follow. Centres are also increasingly linking units together in meaningful ways so that in some instances there is an internal cohesiveness in the folder.

The vast majority of teacher examiners are meticulous in ensuring that units are marked accurately according to the grids, and check carefully that the submitted units are the candidate's own work. Centres are also increasingly alert to the possibility of plagiarism; they show awareness in their assessments of the degree of assistance offered and often acknowledge drafting.

There were, however, the usual administrative irritants - for example, the failure to include candidate numbers on the frontsheet, mismatches between the mark on the folder and the mark on the optems, un-headed student unit sheets and so on - all of which take time for external moderators to resolve, but there were few issues with Candidate Authentication Forms this year. Occasionally problems were caused by the failure to check the adding up on the frontsheets; centres need reminding again that this may cause serious problems.

Candidates in general performed well in this component of the specification and the best folders were very impressive in both their individuality and their range. Most centres are confidently aware of the syllabus requirements, and often a great deal of thought is given to ways in which these requirements can be met.

Personal and Imaginative Unit

The writing unit still produces the most engaged work in the folder; the overall level of personal writing is high perhaps because the work for this unit is generally well tailored to the individual candidate. There was a huge range of writing, including description, narrative and autobiography. It was noted that a much greater emphasis was placed on love/friendship as a theme, it was also mentioned that there was a preponderance of horror stories, including candidates from one centre who wrote in the style of Edgar Allan Poe. Other literature extension work included empathic pieces based on 'Journey's End', mostly war diaries and letters. In general, the more

personal the writing, the more powerful and engaging it was. Writing in a specific genre (for instance horror, 'twist in the tail' stories) worked less well; horror tended to be envisaged entirely in visual terms and the twist was often all too predictable.

1204 Media Texts

There is an increasing (and entirely appropriate) tendency to use film, rather than print based media, as the basis for this unit. Some centres still rely on a familiar mix of comparisons of tabloid and broadsheet newspapers, or analysis of advertisements. The newspaper comparison works well if the articles are stimulating; too often they were dull and sometimes dated. Many centres also use advertisements (rather more successfully) as the basis for the unit; one very successful response linked the analysis of an actual advertisement with one designed by the candidate herself. Overall, the moving image pieces were more successful and were certainly rather more engaged and engaging. A comparison of the presentation of women in film posters provided an interesting focus of study and stimulated some detailed work. Some centres linked the work for this unit with other units; Shakespeare films provided a rich field in this respect. It would be particularly helpful to moderators if centres, using print based media material, were to include photocopies of this with the individual folders or with the sample.

Shakespeare

The favoured texts were again 'Macbeth' and 'Romeo and Juliet' and the tasks were also very familiar, but most were still capable of stimulating a new generation of candidates; questions on fate, witchcraft, the nature of kingship, the role of the tragic protagonists provided rich fields for analytical commentary. On occasions, however, task setting was disengaging; it was noted that meaningful answers could not arise from a title as generic as "write about the importance of Act Three", which presumably depends on intensive teaching and does little service either to the weakest or the strongest of candidates. Another disquieting trend, noted by moderators, is to limit the task to the consideration of one scene, often a scene which had been used for a Key Stage 3 examination. Technically such tasks are in breach of the specification requirement to consider whole texts; most candidates try to relate the scene to the whole play, but such additional comment is often very basic. On the other hand there was challenging work on texts such as 'King Lear' (on the theme of relationships) and 'Hamlet' (the presentation of women). There was a variety of texts being used this year including "Titus Andronicus", "Othello", "The Tempest", "Julius Caesar" and "Much Ado" in one centre alone. Some candidates wrote lengthy introductory sections on the historical or social background to the play and then failed to link these meaningfully to the rest of the assignment.

1204 2F

Introduction to Papers 2F and 4H

The papers proved to offer an appropriate challenge to candidates at all levels, and performance covered the full range of what would be expected. There is some sense that centres may be preparing candidates in greater depth for the poetry than the non-fiction prose.

There continues to be generally encouraging evidence in Reading questions that candidates are willing and able to think about the effects of language used by writers. Supporting comments by evidence is clearly now a way of life for many candidates, and it leads to responses which are often well-focused as well as full of insight. There is still a need in some cases to do more than simply list effects ('feature spotting'), a practice which has been commented on before in these reports. Examiners note that there are candidates who have learned a number of technical terms and are often able to give appropriate examples, but that they do not always look for how observing such an effect contributes to their understanding and appreciation of the text.

Examiners commented on the positive response to the Writing tasks with candidates often revealing real insight into their lives and attitudes, often in ways that were striking and even touching.

Last year, the report stated that "themes from previous years remain stubbornly persistent". Although many centres clearly pay heed to such issues, it remains the case that, if candidates paid greater attention to these basic elements, they could often improve their performance significantly. Some of these recurrent points are listed again below, in the hope of continued improvement in these areas:

- **In Section A, a significant proportion of candidates wrote on only one poem rather than two or had very uneven coverage. Candidates should appreciate that their 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.**
- **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' or 'play' for 'prose'.**
- Centres should continue to stress to candidates the importance of clear handwriting which is not too small and which is in black, 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.

It would be extremely beneficial if centres encouraged candidates to write down plans and notes on a question in the answer booklet itself in the relevant section of the paper, before the start of the question. Whilst many candidates did this, others had written a plan or notes for a question at the end of the previous section or on an assortment of pieces of paper which were either attached by a treasury tag at the end of the script, or with the corner turned down to 'attach' it, or sometimes just included loosely between two pages. If such plans and notes are included in the booklet, candidates should just put one line through them before starting the answer or indicate clearly that it is rough work.

1204 3F

Overall candidates on both tiers understood and responded effectively to the unprepared reading passages and engaged with the questions throughout the paper. There were no major problems.

Points to bear in mind include the need for candidates to read the Question 1 extracts both quickly and closely, skills that can be learnt. The “use of language” bullet point is a key discriminator in this question; this aspect remains a particular weakness in Foundation Tier responses.

In responses to writing questions, there are still candidates who write very informally and inappropriately, sometimes using expletives. Such work will inevitably receive very low marks on the marking grids, particularly in terms of “communicative effectiveness.”

Better planning would help in all answers; in particular, responses to writing questions, which show evidence of careful choices in vocabulary and sentence structures, are rewarded. Careful timing is crucial. Section C responses were generally the weakest and briefest. Candidates also tend to describe and narrate, rather than analyse, comment or review.

Q1

The passage proved accessible to the vast majority of candidates. Most were also able to empathise with the journalist and produce thoughtful commentaries on how the writer created a vivid picture of her experiences as a fan. Some empathised too strongly and wrote very subjectively; the weakest candidates of all merely responded to the issues which the extract raised and offered no analysis at all. Most candidates, however, were able to make useful comments on each of the bullet points. On the whole references to the text and the use of quotation were appropriate. Candidates are now well versed in the techniques of the PEC (point, evidence and comment) approach. More successful candidates were able to do this taking into account the overall effect of the passage on the audience, referring to tone and mood and making links between the bullet points, whilst weaker candidates simply did not consider the passage as a whole.

Successful and appropriate discussion of the use of language can often be a discriminating factor. Sometimes the comment on language amounted to little more than “feature spotting” coupled with a quotation, whereas more successful candidates at this level began to consider the ways in which linguistic features were used by the writer to interest the reader in her experiences. Weaker candidates also took the passage at face level; abler candidates commented on, and responded to, the writer’s self deprecating wit and humour.

Section B

Q2

Foundation Tier candidates seemed to relish this question both in terms of the content - there was much reference to Teenage Tribes - and the context of the magazine; there was some lively and generally appropriate writing. However, as with the companion question in the Higher Tier, some candidates spent unnecessary time

and effort constructing columns or even drawing illustrations which are not assessable in terms of writing skills.

Better answers tended to blend personal experience with general observations on teenagers; weaker answers tended to lose themselves in a welter of personal experience and lost sight of the necessity to persuade also. 'Persuasion' should be addressed in terms of expression, organisation and content. More successful candidates provided a clear structure of points to communicate their viewpoint and develop an argument; they also attempted to choose words and sentences to convey this in an engaging way for the reader.

Q3

This question was the most popular in the section; the subject engaged the candidates on a personal level and most candidates expressed their views strongly. School uniform is still a bone of much contention amongst teenagers and opinion seemed equally divided between those who were in favour and those who were against. It was clear also that candidates had discussed this in school as the arguments were confident and showed different viewpoints (often from the teachers' perspective as well). Even the weakest candidates presented sensible and appropriate points.

In general the arguments were presented in a reasoned way with examples and evidence. The most successful answers were those essays which showed evidence of having been planned so that the argument was developed with effective points being made throughout the essay.

Some candidates became too carried away by the 'unfairness' of it resulting in answers amounting to little more than a rant. There was a tendency to use made up statistics in ways which overstated the candidate's case - for instance "It's a known scientific fact that 80% of teenagers are less grumpy if they get to wear their own clothes to school."

The bullet points in the question helped candidates to focus on the issues and think of relevant points, but all too frequently they were used indiscriminately to form a paragraph structure, leading to some rather mechanical and disjointed argument. A bler candidate recognised and responded to the context of a classroom debate more clearly and attempted to use rhetorical language to influence the audience.

Section C

Q4

The "passionate interests" of the candidates were predictably focused on the ones mentioned in the question, notably sport. As with Question 3 the bullet points tended to be used as a structure, rather than as prompts. A few candidates followed the structural format of the Question 1 passage, some sensibly, others slavishly. In the main answers were developed and reasonably analytical.

Some weaker answers relied entirely on description; for instance an account of a football match did not meet the demands of the question. The wording of the question provided a direct invitation to the candidate to comment and analyse, and offered a simple structure, yet some candidates ignored it or missed the point.

Q5

As with the companion question in Higher Tier, this produced some of the most engaging responses in the paper. Many of the comments in that report apply here too. There were some very varied responses.

Candidates need to remember that the triplet addressed in this section is to “analyse, review and comment” so a narrative or a description does not fully meet the criteria. Some reviews were mere re-telling of the plots of books or films, and accounts of gigs tended to be descriptive (often very vividly) rather than analytical. More successful answers were cohesive and considered both the good and bad points of book, film or gig in a reflective way. Stronger candidates also chose language carefully to make their comments clear. Good planning is particularly important in this section of the paper.

As with the Higher Tier answers, the analysis of books and films was more focused than that of gigs, however revealing the incidental details were.

1204 4H

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Paper 4H

All questions discriminated well, and contained answers covering the full range of responses.

Section A

In general, responses conformed to patterns established in previous years. This Section again produced much excellent writing, with many candidates responding maturely to the poems and engaging thoughtfully with the texts. The sensitivity of their interpretation was often impressive. Many made a very good attempt 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 poetic devices, such as alliteration, and offer examples. This suggested that teaching has often been successful in encouraging such comment. Examiners once again noted that candidates were generally capable of an individual response, geared towards the demand of the question - although some answers plainly demonstrated the effects of teaching which could on occasion seem over-directive.

Question 1

This question, on setting and mood in the two named poems, produced responses of widely varying success, but it was often answered very well by those candidates who really grasped the theme of the question, with its focus on 'the importance of setting and mood'. Stronger candidates were astute on the effect of imagery and change in rhythm, focusing on syntax and line length. Hardy's deathly imagery and sombre mood were identified, with close exploration of the imagery of desolation combined with good use of critical vocabulary. The complexity of the ideas in this poem, however, defeated some candidates, who were very uncertain of Hardy's point of view. They sometimes compensated by writing at length on *Dulce et Decorum Est*, on which poem most candidates made useful comments and some were exceptionally cogent in their response. In general, those candidates who satisfied the criteria in the mark scheme for top bands showed the capacity to respond with insight and detailed analysis on both poems, some showing a keen eye for the striking language effects employed by both Owen and Hardy. The weaker candidates struggled to understand how the writers, by choice of language, conveyed setting and mood and instead discussed the contexts of the two poems in much more general terms.

Question 2

The focus of the question was time, in *Electricity Comes to Cocoa Bottom* and one other poem this distinguished sharply between those candidates who adopted a 'write everything you know...' approach and those who explored the way in which the theme of time united the poems' ideas. More able candidates understood the theme,

in *Electricity Comes to Cocoa Bottom*, of 'technology v. nature' and explained the imagery in that context. Some successful answers on this poem contrasted the vivid descriptions of the light provided by nature and that produced by the electricity cable, which was compared to a pencil line across the sun. Some thoughtful answers considered the time spent for the climax, and also commented on time on a larger scale: modernisation and the awe and trepidation, as shown where Granny P "peeped". Sometimes candidates penalised themselves with their choice of a second poem - for example, some struggled to find much material relevant to time in poems such as *Brendan Gallacher* or *Death in Leamington*, although there was some potential in each of these. Indeed, the theme of time was occasionally ignored in the choice of second poem, and candidates just wrote about another poem - *Wherever I Hang* was a case in point.

Question 3

This question elicited many very good responses, with candidates often exploring the effect of a brother's death in *Mid-Term Break* and the complex feelings expressed in *Once Upon a Time* with subtlety and sensitivity. Some very impressive language terminology was used by candidates. However, such good responses were by no means universal, and those who failed to analyse or produce textual evidence scored much less well. Often comments on *Mid-Term Break* were not directly focused on the question - often candidates were determined to write about the scene at the end and the significance of the snowdrops and candle, without relating this to people's feelings. Responses in the lower range tended to focus on the reaction of the characters around the boy in "*Mid-Term Break*", whereas higher band responses explored how the style and structure of the poem revealed how the boy himself was concealing his own grief and was detached from the situation. The 'poppy bruise' and possible link to remembrance was explained only in the higher quality responses. On *Once Upon a Time*, there was often a sound appreciation of the idea of smiling without expression, shaking hands without feeling or uttering words without meaning - all ways of concealing true feelings.

Question 4

The Quality of candidates' response was often determined particularly through candidates' choice of a second poem to accompany *Warning*. Where this was less clearly relevant to the question's focus, comments about stereotypical views were correspondingly thin and ill-focused. Higher range responses, however, identified the humour in the poem and paid close attention to the effect of words such as "gobble" and "spit", as well as referring to subtle changes in tone. Those who chose to write, for their second poem, on *Not My Best Side* had ample scope for relevant comment on each of the three characters, and sometimes wrote at considerable length, supporting their points strongly, as in the comments by the following candidate on the portrayal of the dragon: "It begins with the viewpoint of the dragon who stereotypically is depicted as a ruthless murdering beast. However, Fanthorpe cleverly flips the situation on its head. As the readers, we are drawn into the mind of the character, who feels he has been misjudged in his characteristics, saying: 'The artist didn't give me a chance to pose properly'." Similarly, many candidates who examined *Still I Rise* gave impressive answers, with detailed language analysis and well-chosen quotations throughout. "Hide and Seek" was also a good choice, with able candidates exploring the changing mood over time and responding to the richness of imagery. More able candidates identified the changing rhythm and mood via sentence length. On the other hand, a number of candidates who chose the poem *Mirror* discovered that this was not the best poem for the theme of stereotypes.

Question 5

Questions 5 and 6 remain the least often chosen, and many centres do not appear to consider 'Nature'. Those who take this selection often justify their choice by excellent and sustained responses, commenting on language effectively and showing intelligence in their interpretation.

In Question 5, candidates were asked to look at *Wind* and *The Thought-Fox*, looking at the writer's use of imagery and other effects. As always, Ted Hughes brought out the best in the most able – but. The majority of the candidates responded to *Wind* very well and were able to write confidently about Hughes' use of language.

There was less confidence in candidates' responses when dealing with the portrayal of nature and answers were at times superficial in their analysis: some weaker candidates did not go beyond paraphrasing, ignoring tone and rhythm.

When writing about *The Thought-Fox*, some candidates focused solely on the fox and failed to connect it with the writing process. Some good answers explored the way in which the natural scene was much calmer than that in *Wind*, and considered how imagery, and rhythm captured the fox's movements and the corresponding thought processes, though few considered the aural quality of Hughes' writing.

Question 6

The question focused on *Thistles* and one other poem, inviting candidates to explore the relationship between humans and natural forces. This question was handled very well by the majority of those attempting it – perhaps because *Nettles* was obviously suited as a choice. Most wrote about these two poems, exploring the military imagery common to both poems with a degree of success. The inability of man to overcome nature easily was generally well grasped and better candidates noted the interesting similarity between human ageing and that of the plants ('Then they grow grey, like men'). Some other appropriate choices were made and often led to good treatment.

The comparison between thistles & Vikings was clearly understood – as was the pain of nettle stings: some also commented on the irony of "bed". Candidates were able to understand the military imagery and the concept of futile battles between man and nature and consequently gained credit for language evaluation. Not all comments were equally well attuned to the poems' ideas: one candidate wrote of *Thistles* that "the battle will continue until a good weed killer is found". Language comments on occasion needed sharper focus or explanation: a candidate wrote, for example, that 'In *Thistles* the writer uses a lot of commas to emphasise the strength'. Sometimes the comment on war imagery was repetitive and what was lacking was the underlying message of the father's futile desperation to protect his vulnerable son in *Nettles*.

Section B

Question 7

This question received responses of very different quality. In particular, the higher quality responses were those which engaged thoughtfully with the moral issues raised in *Vendetta* and one other story (most frequently, and very sensibly, *The*

Schoolteacher's Guest), and perceived how different cultural expectations determine people's reactions. There was much relevant comment on particular cultures and traditions, matriarchal and patriarchal societies and the religious connotations in the stories - mostly of good quality, although some confusion between South Africa and the Southern states of the United States of America was evident. At the lower end there were some candidates who only wrote on one story. Examiners noted that the quality of the response had a great deal to do with the choice of the second text. The majority of responses dealing with *The Gold Cadillac* tended to lose their way - only a few were able to get beyond the theme of racism and look at the wider implications of society's role as demanded by the question. There were some pleasing attempts with *A Stench of Kerosene* and *Country Lovers* - especially the latter. However, some candidates were rather uncertain about Thebedi's role, thinking, for example, that she had brought the court case against Paulus. Whichever story was chosen, however, there was a great deal of story retelling and in some responses language analysis on both texts was limited in quality and quantity. Examiners noted that this question prompted many long and detailed responses, some engaging particularly well with the moral perspectives, as in the following comments by a candidate on *The Schoolteacher's Guest*: "These people... believe that Ines was right to do what she did and there is a great sense of justice in all. The whole town helps Ines to dispose of the body, as they helped all those years before to desecrate the house of the killer... There is no sense anywhere that Ines should not have done what she did - nobody is struggling with a sense of right and wrong."

Section C

Outstanding essays were particularly marked on Question 9, which illustrates that young people are extremely capable of reflecting on their own lives as well as on wider issues within society.

Question 8

The title 'When one door closes, another opens', evoked answers of widely differing quality, and hence was clearly an effective discriminator. The idea of the 'two doors' proved an effective stimulus to many candidates to write about 'lost opportunities', sometimes making less out of the new door which opened. In the less effective responses, ideas did not communicate the antithesis at all clearly and were limited by less than proficient control of accurately expressed English. The doors in question offered views into many different worlds, which were a pleasure to read. Many pieces were clearly imaginative and not based on personal experience, but that of a fictional character. Errors in the spelling of high-frequency homophones and failure to accurately use apostrophes correctly were common features of mid to lower range responses.

Candidates wrote about many different subjects, with sporting opportunities or lost opportunities presented particularly frequently, often with a sense of humour. One wrote with a refreshingly sophisticated degree of self-mockery, in the style of a teenage magazine, about an infatuation from which she was relieved to have escaped: "I recall that he looked somewhat like a vampire, with the stark contrast of his milk-white skin and ebony hair, smoothed back with a layer of gel which gave it a blue sheen. His hair glistened in the sun, although its beauty was broken for me as the slimy, tadpole-like substance melted in the radiating heat, sliding down his left ear like a snail's tail. His name was Peter and I was obsessed by him..." A few candidates showed how something had affected family relationships and explained how a new opportunity had improved matters. Some also referred to how an entry

into one higher education establishment had been lost and another gained, or how a career in drama or singing had had to be abandoned but a contrasting career had arisen as a possibility. One examiner noted that there were some engaging accounts of high aspirations that were shattered by some catastrophic event.

Question 9

On this question, where candidates had free rein to express personal views on a range of contemporary issues in a diary entry on paper or on a website, there was a marked difference between those who used language flexibly and thoughtfully in support of strongly-articulated and revealing ideas and those whose views were basic and expressed with less clarity. However, the former category was strongly represented. Examiners referred to responses as “a real eye opener”, and several described it as an insight into teenage minds and twenty-first century life through the student’s eye: for another, marking the responses “re-affirmed my faith in the youth of today”, and another referred to marking these answers as “enlightening and frightening”.

Some extremely mature outlooks were presented and a wide range of issues was raised thoughtfully - including global warming, drug and alcohol abuse, medicine and even world politics. Responses looked at the lives, pressures and fears that young people face today, with mature discussion of how today’s world was or was not different from previous generations, as in the following thoughtful example. “I have heard people say that the world is a more dangerous place now than it was in the past. On the face of it this appears to be true... But I do not think that this is so different from how the world used to be. There are still wars and diplomatic tensions, people still killing each other just to steal some loose change. I believe the world is just as dangerous, only there are new dangers to fear.” The common perceptions expressed by society and media about ‘youth’ were addressed with great maturity. Technology, covering ipods, mobile phones, HD television and many others clearly rather alien to many examiners, was another common theme: it was either loved or hated, or candidates were schizoid: they could not live with or without it, in some cases. There were also many observations about changes in family and social life, often expressed in contemporary vernacular terms: “chavs,” “hoodies”, “emos”, “peer pressure”. A huge concern was expressed about knife and gun crime and violence amongst young people in general, not least because of a resentment at being tarred with the same brush as the disruptive minority. They wished to dissociate themselves from those who gave all young people a bad name: many seemed to be saying - ‘yes, some of us are bad, but not all of us, so give us a chance.’ The fear factor with regard to such crime was particularly evident throughout all responses, with candidates often referring to their or their parents’ fears about the young going outside alone. Another recurrent theme was that of examination pressure on the young, linked to such preoccupations as national school ‘league tables’. One examiner noted that if the young people’s views could be collated and passed to government, maybe something would change for the better.

Individual comments were often personal, refreshing and even painfully amusing, as that from the candidate who wrote: “I agree adults didn’t have technology thirty years ago, and that is why many of them have boring jobs such as road sweeping, exam moderation and exam marking!”. Writing registers varied, as would be expected, and mostly were apt for something written personally and not necessarily for wide consumption. Sometimes the tone was at the extremely informal end; on other occasions, candidates chose something more akin to an academic essay register, including attempts at a formal, objective assessment of life. Grasp of the centuries, including our own, was not always secure. One candidate wanted to live in the 20th

century to see the work of Newton (should that have been Einstein?). In the 1900s, according to one candidate, people apparently “sent their children out to play in the dead of night”.

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. **It remains the case that careful attention to editing would improve the technical accuracy of candidates’ work and, with 8 of the 25 allotted marks going to Assessment Objective iii, this is an important consideration.**

1204 5H

Overall candidates on both tiers understood and responded effectively to the unprepared reading passages and engaged with the questions throughout the paper. There were no major problems.

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Section A

Q1

Most candidates were well prepared for this question and engaged with the extract, which allowed both a straightforward interpretation of the text and offered opportunities for more complex analysis. Understanding the text posed few problems, as evidenced by the often lengthy and developed answers.

Most candidates identified the ‘special pleasures’ referred to in the question and commented on them with reasonable effectiveness. The bullet points focused attention on the key elements in the passage and helped candidates to access the passage. Able candidates engaged with the passage at a deeper level and wrote about the atmosphere in some depth, sometimes commenting in an almost philosophical way on the spiritual aspects of it. They also responded to the extract’s tone of exhilaration and wonder, and commented on the enhancing language and the superlatives. On the other hand, weaker candidates struggled more, largely because of a failure to read the passage closely enough; though it is full of positive language, a few became fixated with supposedly sinister aspects, often through reading too literally (“raging river” “geographical fault”). Some candidates also muddled the third bullet point about “the people, including the writer”, seeing the women in a darker light and “the ragged old man” as malevolent, despite the reference to these “gentle, generous people.”

The passage was rich linguistically and there were plenty of language features to comment on; weaker candidates tended to “feature spot”, picking out similes and metaphors without relating them to their specific effect in the passage, whilst able candidates explored this aspect analytically, some using a number of technical terms to streamline their commentary and illustrating their points with deft quotations. Some of the most successful transferred the epithet “long suffering” from the car to the experience of returning to “civilisation” after spending time in an “idyllic place”,

commenting that this was the price that had to be paid for such a “glimpse” of a “magical” picnic spot.

Section B

Q2

This was the most popular question in this section and produced some sound, perhaps predictable responses, with frequent references to ‘chavs’, ‘emos’, ‘goths’ and ‘hoodies.’ The latter were often linked to touching stories about good deeds (typically little old ladies being helped across roads by youths in hoods.) Some wrote powerfully from personal experience and others included graphic references. The expression “never judge a book by its cover” appeared in many answers and often to provide a neat conclusion. Many candidates judged and stereotyped groups whilst telling the reader not to do so.

Candidates seemed to enjoy writing for the magazine context and showed a sound grasp of audience and purpose. Some wasted time and sometimes created unnecessary difficulties for themselves by using graphics and columns, despite repeated warnings in examination reports that using such features cannot be rewarded on the marking grids. Statistics were used and expert opinion often quoted; in most instances these bolstered the argument but where the statistics were clearly made up for the occasion - for instance wild and poorly expressed statements such as “85% of the population are unhappy with the way they looked whilst 40% of suicides happened because someone had commented on the way they looked. These figures are horrifying” - served only to undermine the points made.

It is important to remind candidates that whilst their views may be strongly held, over-forceful expression can turn easily into rant. Measured and reasoned argument was the basis of the most effective and genuinely persuasive argument. Candidates need to think carefully about expression; varied, appropriate vocabulary and a range of sentences structures should be used to engage and influence the reader.

Q3

This seemed to attract more able candidates and there were some very impressive answers, perhaps reflecting the effectiveness with which they had been taught citizenship. Overall, the standard of answers was certainly good and the arguments both focused and persuasive. A wide range of views and arguments was presented and there was a personal engagement to many of the responses.

Candidates were almost equally divided in their views. Those in favour of lowering the voting age argued that you can get married, join the armed forces, and be liable for tax at 16, yet you can’t vote, and that the government that is elected without your vote will pass laws that apply to you. Others felt that most 16 year olds were only interested in themselves and their hormonal demands and therefore would not use their vote wisely.

The most successful answers were those essays which showed evidence of planning so that the argument was developed with effective points being made throughout the essay. As with Question 2, the communication of strongly held views in forceful, considered argument was most effectively conveyed through varied and well chosen language and sentences. Some very successful responses used rhetorical devices to

emphasise points. Answers also showed that candidates had been taught to use discourse markers to help structure their ideas.

Whilst many candidates were very well informed, some used spurious polls, surveys and statistics (for example "Recent polls suggest that only 23% of our country votes") and quoted various so-called experts making overly supportive statements; one examiner suggested that "there are better ways to teach candidates how to argue and persuade than resorting to this tired method of winning a point!"

The letter format was used successfully in the main but there were still those who began inappropriately with "To whom it may concern". The command of tone was variable in quality; the letter required a degree of formality, yet some wrote very personally and informally to the Prime Minister as though there were a conspiracy on foot and he needed to be warned.

Section C

Q4

This proved a very accessible question. For many "the perfect day out" was either the beach or the park, with friends or with family. Some stronger candidates recognised that a perfect day was different for each individual and developed this idea, often suggesting that the weather, place or circumstances were of little importance, provided you were with people you had chosen and who made you feel happy, relaxed and wanted.

There are distinctive differences between narrative description and analytical commentary. Those candidates, who recognised this most clearly and sought to define what the perfect day was, were more successful than those who slipped into narrative or dealt descriptively with details, such as journeys, food, how many rides they queued for, and so on. Some of the weakest responses failed to analyse or comment at all. Some resorted to list making; 'some people like to go to the beach, some people like to go shopping, some people like to sunbathe', and so on. Essentially the more analytical the answer, the better it was.

However, some of the better answers also were the most imaginative; these were candidates who imagined something special as the "perfect day out". These managed to write creatively whilst at the same time including analysis.

The occasional candidate's timing was faulty so that comments on the perfect day were not sustained beyond the first paragraph.

Q5

This question was far more popular than question 4 possibly because it fell very directly within the experience of many teenagers, especially those who were film buffs or had been to concerts or gigs, particularly at famous venues. The book reviews were the best, with film critiques a close second; the gig reviews were the weakest. Candidates who wrote about films or books tended to be better at focusing on the medium not the experience itself, and they also used language more appropriately. Those writing reviews of gigs tended to use very informal language and spent more time on the peripherals than the merits and demerits of the band. One candidate wrote four sides on a Spice Girls concert, dealing with traffic, food,

toilets (at some length), merchandise, venue, and security; the concert itself was described in three words as “an invigorating experience.”

The most successful candidates wrote detailed, engaged reviews offering individualised interpretations. Some of the best were on the newly released ‘Indiana Jones and the Crystal Skull’ and, perhaps surprisingly, on ‘Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows’. The best were very readable and well-judged; the weaker attempts sometimes did not mention, apart from the title, any detail at all or narrated in full the entire story/plot.

Statistics for GCSE English 1204

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

Grade	Max. Mark	C	D	E	F	G
Boundary Mark	100	57	45	34	23	12

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

Grade	Max. Mark	A*	A	B	C	D	E
Boundary Mark	100	86	75	64	53	41	35

Notes

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

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