

English (Opening Minds)

General Certificate of Secondary Education **1900**

Examiners' Reports

January 2011

1900/R/11J

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Reports should be read in conjunction with the published question papers and mark schemes for the Examination.

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Chief Examiner's Report

Reports on the Units taken in January 2011

In total, about 4,500 candidates aggregated in this series, although the total number of entries for individual units combined was nearer 7,000. Examiners for all units report, in general, that the candidature covered the full range of achievement expected from students at this level, although, as is inevitable at this time of year, it would appear that a significant number were re-sitting the examination with the hope of gaining a higher grade than that which they achieved in the summer and that quite a few of these were being a little over-optimistic in entering for Higher Tier units.. In general, Examiners felt that the question papers allowed candidates to respond with interest and to achieve results commensurate with their ability. Detailed comments from the Principal Examiners for each unit are to be found elsewhere in this report but the following points of more general interest are relevant to all centres preparing candidates for this examination in June 2011:

- Examiners for all units expressed concern about the number of syntactical, spelling and punctuation errors that are being made by a large number of candidates in their responses to the various Writing tasks. In particular, the attention of Centres is drawn to the failure of many candidates to focus on paragraphing and their frequent (and apparently unthinking) use of inappropriate colloquialisms. As mentioned in the report for January 2010 series, the apostrophe of both possession and omission is a seriously endangered species.
- Another concern raised by Examiners for all units is the now almost endemic obsession shown by many candidates to spot 'the magic rule of three' whenever it might possibly be thought to be present. It cannot be emphasised too strongly, that those setting questions **do not** do so with the specific intention of including as many figures of speech and/or rhetoric as they can, nor is their intention that candidates should do no more than merely mention such figures when they do actually occur. It should also be emphasised the writers of most of the passages selected as stimulus material for Reading questions do not consciously use such devices and that a tricolon correctly used is something more sophisticated in intention and effect than the phrase 'noisy, filthy, greedy and violent' spotted hopefully by many candidates for 2431/01!
- The Principal Moderators for Units 2434 and 2435 (Written Coursework and Speaking and Listening) have commented on the number of administrative errors emanating from number of Centres. While OCR fully understand the pressures that Centres are under at this time of year, it is important that administrative procedures are adhered to – the new Specifications, which will be first examined in 2011, comprise 60% Controlled Assessment which will involve increased administration by Centres. It is in everyone's interest – not least that of the candidates – that administration runs smoothly.
- However, now that this Specification has almost reached its the end of its life, it should be mentioned that Examiners' comments have always been more positive than negative and there has been considerable evidence of improved performance from candidates over the years, especially in their attempts to analyse the reading passages in 2431/01 and in the improved focus and concision of their answers to Question 1 in 2431/02.

2431/01 Non-Fiction, Media and Information

General Comments

Generally, all examiners considered the examination to be of an appropriate level of difficulty and comparable to those of previous sessions. There was a wide range of achievement across a normal distribution, and there were very few candidates who made little or no attempt at answering all the questions.

The content was accessible and encouraging. In the reading passage for Question 1, the argument involving the effects of events affecting the food chain for the fish and birds of the North Sea was well understood. This may have been because the concept was familiar to candidates in that food chains are a key part of GCSE Science. Be that as it may, the argument about the one degree rise in the temperature of the sea was simply and lucidly explained by the writer, Simon Barnes.

Question 2 was, as usual, the one where taught techniques were clearly in evidence in candidates' answers, as they worked through the article systematically and were able to score creditably. The unusual photograph clearly had an impact on most candidates, who were able to analyse their reactions to it in relation to the written content of the article.

Candidates worked much harder on Section A than they did on Section B. The essays frequently degenerated into a headlong personal rant in a tone of indignation and with colloquial expression. There was not much evidence of planning and thinking through an answer that was to be marked for writing.

Comments on Individual Questions

SECTION A

*(1 a) From **paragraph one**, (beginning 'Here are two ways...'), what **two** actions will have bad results?*

*(1 b) From **paragraph three**, (beginning 'Now for something...'), write down **two** things in Nature which foxes depend on for survival?*

*(1 c) From **paragraph six**, (beginning 'The North Sea has become...'), which **two** species of bird will have no food because the sand eels have died?*

These questions were answered very well. They are best answered with concise two-point responses and most candidates were aware of this and gained the full five marks available with economy. Where there was a problem, it was usually in 1(a) rather than in (b) or (c), the mark being lost either by referring to one action only or by referring to objects with no sense of action. Some candidates did waste time by writing far more than was necessary, whereas most realised that brief quotations alone were sufficient to gain full marks. In any event, these simple questions helped candidates to access the problems required to be identified and described in answer to Question 1(d).

(1d) In lines 14-32(beginning 'But you on your own...'), what problems does the writer say have followed the one degree rise in the temperature of the North Sea?

Most candidates understood and were able to express the consequences of the rise in temperature. They could see the progression through the food chain and organised their

answers according to the logical sequence of events. There was very little wholesale copying. Most answers made cause and effect very clear, using terms such as 'and so', 'as a result', 'causing' and 'meaning that'. There was usually a culminating comment on the effect on tourism in the Orkney and Shetland islands. One misunderstanding that occurred a significant number of times was the assumption that the migrating plankton were heading for warmer water. The premise of the article was the opposite, that the plankton were so sensitive to the temperature change, that a rise of one degree forced them northwards, ie to slightly cooler water.

(2) How does the article set out to convince you that seagulls in towns and cities are a serious problem?

During the course of this Specification, no aspect of the question paper has seen such a dramatic rise in the quality of answers as in the responses to the Presentation section of Question 2. Examiners now have to reward the explanations for and the elaborations of the Presentation features of the Question 2 passage, whereas a few years ago they were happy merely to identify them. This was especially so with this paper in respect of the unusual full-width photograph of a seagull flying directly at the camera, beak open and 'savagely destructive talons' in evidence. The photograph prompted many candidates to go beyond description and to write a full analytical account of the effect of such a terrifying picture on the reader. Explanations of the effect of the juxtaposition of the headline wording – 'Meet Your New Neighbours' – and the photograph showed a genuinely critical appreciation of the effect of this aspect of the layout of the article. Unfortunately, many referred to this headline as 'heading' or 'title', though some who did use the word 'headline' also referred to 'strapline' to identify 'A seagull invasion of inland Britain' and to explore the connotations of 'invasion'.

Weaker candidates, as usual, wrote answers which rambled generally and generically, making observations that weren't specific to the passage: 'The title was effective...the passage is written in columns...there is a picture...there are subheadings'. Factual information, rather than inferences, was easily identified. Middle band candidates explained the content or paraphrased the information in such a way that showed straightforward understanding. Attempts to comment on the language used by the writer sometimes led to a list of quotations.

However, there was much evidence of thorough preparation by schools for this question. A surprisingly large number of candidates tried, with various degrees of success, to write about the use of statistics and rhetorical questions. Of course, the 'literacy strategy' was responsible for the perennial identification of 'the rule of three', usually wrongly applied to the clause 'They're noisy, filthy, greedy and violent'.

But the better candidates produced a wealth of relevant material couched in appropriately critical argument. There were comments about features such as humour and explanations of the force of particular phrases, such as the 'impressive threat' which 'hurtles through the sky'. There was a focus on the word 'problem' in the stem of the question. Noise and damage were almost always identified as problems, usually with an associated analysis of the phrase 'the ear-splitting noise of them all shrieking at once' and an acknowledgement of the effect of the rapid sequence of vivid and high-energy verbs, 'rip...scatter...scavenge...smash'. Valid points were also made concerning the writer's use of personal pronouns and the reference to neighbourhood 'hooligans'.

Responses like these are surely all we can hope for in an examination study of a media text – and they were suitably rewarded.

SECTION B

(3) Write the words of a talk to your class entitled 'What annoys me most'. **Describe** what annoys you and **explain** why.

The good quality found in Section A was not, however, much in evidence in the writing task. There were a few well-structured and paragraphed essays showing attention to all elements of the task – conveying information by explaining reasons for annoyance and also being descriptive of that information rather than producing a series of narrative anecdotes. The best answers also showed an awareness that the task was to write 'the words of a talk' rather than to give a transcription of talking. It should be remembered that this is a talk to be given in public – 'to your class' – and that, albeit in a speech register, the structure, vocabulary, spelling and punctuation must be correct. Public speakers are able to hand out copies of their speech before they deliver it. This is an examination in English, and standards of correctness have to be applied. In the best answers, therefore, there was a sense of formality in the structure and adopted register, usually focussing on just one topic and linking to it the different aspects of annoyance.

What usually happened, however, was that most candidates treated the question as an opportunity for a personal rant about a list of things which were a cause of annoyance. Sources of annoyance were of the obvious kind: teachers, parents, siblings, two-faced friends, lying, bullying, chewing gum, rainy weather, missing the bus and bad manners. This degeneration into a diatribe about trivial matters restricted writing development and the achievement of an appropriate ending. Such responses were repetitive and formless, lacking in structure and expressed colloquially with spelling weaknesses and many punctuation errors.

Writing was very much in the teenage vernacular – 'out with me mates', 'doing stuff', 'yeah', 'it was, like, rubbish'. However, there was little in the way of text message spelling and very few instances of 'gonna' and 'wanna'. In fact, one candidate wrote about being annoyed by the laziness and carelessness of those who can't be bothered to spell properly: 'I'm not too good at grammar and paragraphing but I do know basic spelling.' Bless her.

2431/02 Non-Fiction, Media and Information

General Comments

In total, just over 5,000 candidates took the examination for this series. As is always the case at this time of year, there were a large number of middle range responses as many candidates were obviously attempting to improve on grades that they had achieved in June. However, there was a sufficiently large number of responses reaching marks in the highest bands to show that the paper tested fairly across the targeted range of ability, although there was also a significant number of candidates who had serious difficulty in meeting the demands of the tasks and would appear to have been wrongly entered for this tier – at least one candidate made no attempt to answer any of the questions.

In general, candidates found the reading material to be accessible and of interest and there were very few rubric infringements (although a few candidates failed to read questions sufficiently carefully and attempted to answer Question 1 by referring to passage 2 or vice versa). In Task 1, the most successful responses showed the ability to reorganise the material and separate facts from examples especially through the use of their own words – with fewer points to identify than in some passages set for the equivalent task in previous years, the skills of selection and manipulation of material to fit the requirements of the task were particularly important in discriminating between responses. Most candidates, however, went through the text chronologically, consequently limiting their capacity to reorganise the material to fit the higher band criteria.

Across the range of responses, candidates did not always focus exclusively on the content of the passage itself and tended to include references to features of the latest mobile phones in their possession, most of which had not been invented when the passage was written only a short time ago. The text chosen for Task 2 was equally accessible and proved an engaging experience with less reliance than usual on a formulaic, device-spotting hunt although there was still some inability to resist the temptation of the 'magic Rule of Three'. The writing task provided an excellent vehicle for detailed description and explanation of personal feelings. Many, however, contented themselves with rather general and narrative accounts lacking specific focus and detail, or became trapped in personal exhortation more suited to the triplet requiring them to argue, persuade and advise.

Comments on Individual Questions

SECTION A

(1) Outline concisely the recent developments in the mobile phone industry and explain the writer's concerns about them.

Many candidates attempted to use their own words and re-organise the material. A pleasing number of responses showed an overview of the passage, mentioning that new apps were an invasion of privacy, with Google knowing what customers were doing without the customers realising it. However, less successful responses showed a lack of focus and contained a good deal of lifting, quotation, and repetition of points. The majority of responses fell into the Band 4/Band 3 range and failed to go higher, largely because they did not meet the requirement to be concise which is a key discriminator for the highest bands. Another cause of unfocused responses was the uncertainty shown by a significant number of candidates as to whether they should be summarising the passage or analysing it (as with Question 2). This uncertainty of approach resulted in some long, rather rambling answers containing a fair amount of uncalled for

personal opinion. As previously mentioned, the most successful responses were able to extract the relevant information and organise it into two clear sections.

Overall, most candidates appeared to have a secure general understanding of the passage but their responses did not always show a precise understanding of specific points. For example, the point about the concern that Google could sell customers' details to potential sellers was frequently expressed with the implication that the company were accessing customers' personal details purely for their own profit, without making clear the actual reason why they could be selling these details on. Similarly, the points about customers signing away their rights and not appreciating the implications of what they were doing were frequently conflated through lifting from the text without either point being clearly distinguished.

Examiners mention that the most common limitations in candidates' responses were the following:

- Lack of focus on **specific** points thus blurring individual points with too much **general** reference.
- The impulse to add their own personal responses/comments to what they had read leading to loss of concision and focus on the task. They could not contain their anger concerning the threat to personal liberty, for example.
- A tendency to adopt a Task 2 type explanation of the author's reasons/meaning/use of language, resulting in a loss of concision and focus on the task.
- The adoption of a chronological approach, resulting in very long answers lacking the clarity and organisation required to access the higher bands. Candidates are reminded that this task tests selectivity, collation and concision but many candidates lost sight of the requirement to group ideas in overview paragraphs as instructed in the Task outline.

(2) How does the website set out to persuade its readers that there is a threat to their civil liberties?

In your answer you should refer to the way the material is presented, the content and the tone created by the language used.

The choice of website material was topical and proved engaging to candidates. However, as in previous years, it was felt that candidates performed at best adequately rather than well on this question and examiners reported only a handful of incisive analytical responses. Many candidates were able to identify points of content and even language but did not follow up with clear explanation of the author's point/aims so that the intended effect was not clear. Many were happy to claim the existence of, for example, a rhetorical question, but did not feel it was necessary to identify it or explain the point of its use by the author.

There was, however, little misunderstanding of the passage and the author's motives. A large number of candidates wrote descriptively about the passage or made general assertions without providing textual references or examples to support their claims, thereby meeting the Band 5 assessment criteria. However, more successful responses were able to attain the higher bands by focussing on the impact and meaning of key words or phrases. Nevertheless, quite a number of answers comprised a few attempts at explanation which ended up as generalised comments about the features referred to. This was especially true of comments about presentation which frequently became simplistic descriptions of, and unprofitable comments on, font sizes and colour and layout of columns and paragraphs. One examiner commented, 'I never knew that short paragraphs were a sign of anger!'

Most candidates made some reference to the photographs and a pleasing number attempted to do more than simply describe them; however, the photograph of the man's face resulted in some puzzlement as there were many and contradictory interpretations of his expression and also of his identity – was he the author, a politician, Big Brother, David Cameron?

Examiners referred to the following as the most notable features of candidates' responses:

- Candidates enjoyed getting to grips with presentation, describing various layout features such as the use of varying font sizes, styles and colours, introductory paragraph features, sentence types and use of images but not always with consideration of their structural functions and effects. One candidate thought the photograph was of David Cameron and proceeded to rant against the government. A few could explain the effective use of red lettering but fewer could explain the structural links between the photographs and the subject matter.
- Discussion of paragraph structure was generally restricted to block layout features as suitable for a newspaper article with little appreciation of how these paragraphs were linked except for the obvious repetition of the "You should be" feature. Thus, analysis of structure was minimal. Very many thought it was good because it "encouraged you to read" because it was short and not boring. This kind of commentary immediately betrays limited understanding of the criteria required to achieve Band 4.
- Sentence structures were generally accessible with some candidates able to identify the use but not always the effect of short sentences such as "It does."
- Somewhat surprisingly, very few commented on the effect of the use of words in the title "**Unlock democracy**" or were able to explain the significance of the use of "**Nationwide.**" Discussion of vocabulary generally was somewhat limited. Few candidates could identify the cumulative effect of the verbs completing the "You should be" openers. There was some recognition of "Strong" language or "Big" words such as "Human fallibility, vulnerable, alienating, and symptomatic" but no attempt to define their use or effects. It was sometimes clear that candidates did not understand these particular words.
- There was a surprising failure to identify the significant and frequent use of quotation marks for emphasis. Those who noticed them could not always explain their effect.
- Most candidates were able to recognise the use of rhetorical questions but their purpose was rarely fully explained. Few were able to make a generic comment about their use and function and then follow it up with specific examples with detailed analysis.
- Finally, a significant number of candidates attempted to rewrite the question and then answer it: 'How does the writer encourage the reader: to want to read on; to connect with him; to be interested; and to be drawn in?'

SECTION B

(3) Describe a time when your personal freedom was being threatened. Explain how it felt to be in this situation.

There were some excellent answers to this question and the majority of responses showed that the task had been properly understood and addressed. Only a few candidates used the material from Q1 and/or Q2 as a basis for their complaints about their freedom being threatened. Many candidates wrote fictional narratives (we hope!), some of which did not really fit the topic, while others wrote very thoughtful answers which, at least occasionally, sounded like real incidents which had occurred in their lives. Quite a few candidates perhaps lacking the imagination to write a story, could not think of anything else to write and explained how they *might* feel very briefly if their freedom *were* to be curtailed. Popular topics ranged from being 'grounded', or unfairly treated by parents, being bullied at school or threatened in some way, being wrongly accused of an offence such as loitering with intent/ shoplifting, to accounts of negotiating airport security.

Leaving aside the Orwellian nightmare worlds created by some, it is clear that *Facebook* has a lot to answer for, and that there are many nasty teachers and parents out there!

Examiners expressed the following concerns, in particular, about the failure of a large number of candidates to observe the basic rules of written expression. There were many totally unparagraphed responses which were usually indicative of lack of coherence and uncontrolled development of ideas; other responses were simply too short to show any development. There was frequent failure to separate sentences correctly, with the comma and full stop being used interchangeably. The lower case "i" remains popular and the use of capital letters for place names unfashionable. Opening sentences such as 'Me and my friends was going down town...' were a frequent stylistic device and the misuse and non-use of the apostrophe for both possession and omission would now appear to be endemic.

In conclusion, it would seem that the paper allowed all candidates to respond at levels appropriate to their ability. There were some very good responses indeed and others which, although adequate, could have been better had certain points, such as precise focus on the requirements of the questions, been more secure. It is hoped that the content of this report will provide future candidates for this paper with advice and examples of what needs to be done in order to achieve the best result of which they are capable.

2432/01 Different Cultures, Analysis and Argument

General Comments

The paper appears to have been well received by both centres and candidates. All examiners regarded it as being of appropriate difficulty. As is usual in January there was a wide spread of candidates who, despite the smaller entry, still straddled the full range of marks available. The difference (for example) between those who were re-taking the paper as part of an attempt to improve summer grades to a C and those who were, perhaps, taking it in Y11 was no less discernible.

Examiners reported that there were more candidates than usual who found difficulty with Section A. Some admitted openly that they had not studied/read the relevant text; others betrayed the same deficiency in what they wrote. Many answered Section B first but left scant time for Section A. If this is centre (or teacher) policy, it is more rather than less important to stress that time management and consistency of response are of the essence in maximising achievement in the paper as a whole. Examiners found that marking two decent pieces of writing on Section B and then one much weaker one on Section A was a relatively frequent and depressing experience. Many candidates, it was reported, showed only a basic understanding of the stories.

On the other hand there were many well-prepared candidates who wrote with enthusiasm and conviction about their chosen text. The majority had studied "Opening Worlds". There were fewer answers on Hemingway and the usual very few takers for "Things Fall Apart".

The writing tasks worked well: there was little if any sense of disparity of difficulty between questions 7 & 8 as sometimes occurs. All had plenty to say about family and friends and once again the letter to the friend was popular. Very, very few candidates were unable to get onto the tier with either of these tasks. Whilst all this is pleasing, the fact that so many had so much to say tended to militate against mechanical and syntactical accuracy on occasion.

Comments on Individual Questions

SECTION A

*(1) How do the writers in this passage and in **one other story** from the list above present characters experiencing failure?*

As the specification has moved on to its conclusion it has been increasingly clear that candidates and teachers have taken more and more interest in Bolan's father and the ways he is presented in the story. The question was an attempt to appeal to this interest and it worked well for almost all those who chose it. Too many candidates still assert that he is an alcoholic when a far more sensitive reading of the first paragraph given is required. Most, however did a lot with the "moomah and poopah.. Boy!" to link the failure of his education to the jealousy of Bolan which inflames him. Many pointed out that the sense of his failure increases proportionally with his attempts to criticize Bolan's diction and all did well with the point of the concerns with his appearance when they went back to Tuna Puna. There were many, mainly relevant references to other parts of the story including Bolan's initial failure to make friends, his lack of concentration in class and the family's chronic failure to improve their lot.

Other examples of failure were those first of Clement and then of Chase in "The Pieces of Silver"; Cathy in "The Young Couple" and Anna Vasilevna to understand Savushkin (at first) in "The Winter Oak". Many did well with Ravi's experiences of failure at the end of "Games at Twilight".

*(2) How do the writers in any **two** of the stories from the list above present misunderstanding in relationships?*

A roughly equal number of takers of the Anthology selected this title with rather more varied results. Answers that understood and focused on misunderstanding and developed responses to stories with confidence and detail were successful. Many involved unpacking the twists and turns of "Leela's Friend". These were often successful until it came to unraveling the obdurate and depressing conclusion, which takes misunderstanding into a new dimension. "The Winter Oak" was a popular second choice, comparing Anna's myopia at the outset with her epiphanic experiences in the forest. There were some very good answers on "The Red Ball" that dealt with not only the father's failure to understand the son but also vice versa. Similarly some responses gave thorough accounts of Chase: misunderstanding personified.

Weaker answers tended to regurgitate previous practice essays on people being wrongly cheated, poverty and so on with very little attempt to address the task relevantly. All but candidates who plainly did not understand "misunderstanding" managed to say something that was relevant on this topic.

*(3) How does the writer show Santiago's feelings about his fishing trip here and at **one** or **two** other moments in the novel?*

It did not matter whether or not candidates distinguished this passage as one Santiago is recalling from the past or whether they thought it was a part of the present narrative. As we expected, it prompted them to write about the pursuit of the Marlin and then about Manolin. Almost all did so and answers spread right across the mark range. Manolin is obviously a popular character with students and much that was interesting and relevant was written.

Beyond that, the quality of the responses was almost entirely dependent on the degree of detailed textual knowledge candidates had available to them. Some wrote very movingly of the Old Man's feelings when the sharks attack and assault the "great fish" and others looked at the end of the voyage and Santiago's landfall.

*(4) How does the writer show Santiago's determination to succeed at **one** or **two** moments in the novel?*

There were slightly fewer takers for this task and it split those who chose it more sharply. Some of the best work in the entire paper responded to this task with some impressive thinking and detailed support on Hemingway's concerns with heroism, endurance and manliness (aspects of determination) in his portrait of Santiago. Some of this work would have done justice to the upper bands of the Higher Tier.

On the other hand weaker responses struggled to find sufficient detailed support to be very convincing and lapsed into assertion and general references to various bits of the text.

The passages given the most attention included his response to the sharks, his conversations with himself and the marlin during the pursuit of the latter and the picture we have of Santiago as "salao" at the outset.

(5) *How does the writer present the relationship between Okonkwo and Ikemefuna here and at **one** other moment in the novel?*

&

(6) *How does the writer show Okonkwo's strengths **and/or** weaknesses at **two** or **three** moments in the novel?*

Once again, very few candidates in this tier had studied this text. Some very weak candidates wrote about it, having also attempted to respond to the other two texts.

In the few essays that examiners saw, there was, as usual, a clear sense of Okonkwo as he is presented in the first two or three chapters of the book. Better answers went on to say something about the development of Ikemefuna's character and the struggle Okonkwo has with his feelings for him. A few were able to talk with some conviction about the lynching party that he botches so appallingly.

Very few candidates attempted the second task and few of those chose to say anything at all about weaknesses. Strengths included fighting, becoming rich and standing up to those he disrespected.

SECTION B

The stimulus material appeared to have been well received and many more candidates than usual included some of it in their responses. The prompt about pets was especially popular. The issue of friends/ best friends provoked a lot of discussion and reflection in both tasks. Weaker responses simply attempted to take the prompts as paragraph headings (or not) and copy them out unselectively. This is not a recipe for success.

(7) *What matters to you most about your family and friends?*

Very, very few candidates had hard words for their families: trust, support, love, clean clothes and food on the table were all popular responses. Unlike this summer's question 7 ("Are ambitions important to you?") there was massive unanimity amongst candidates. Friends, again, were defined by their trustworthiness, loyalty, complementarity and longevity.

It lent all but the very weakest candidates a clear-cut and self-supporting structure to their work.

(8) *A good friend of yours is finding it difficult to agree to what his/her family request. Write a letter to your friend giving your advice.*

We know that this is a popular format and so it proved again in this session. The advice was in a ratio of around 90/10. The great majority advised their friends to do as their families wished: not necessarily without making their feelings and views clear and expecting that they were listened to with respect: but go with it, nonetheless.

This, in turn was mainly because parents had been very generous/self-sacrificing/hard working on the friend's behalf and they now deserved something back. Advice regarding step-parents was clear: if one blood parent had treated the other badly, friends should encourage step fathers/mothers and not make difficulties for them.

The exceptions involved dangerous and precipitate moves abroad: Australia was a very unpopular destination this time; dropping out of School/College to bring more money into the home (for example "to pay for your own food") and, passionately, arranged or forced marriages.

Examiners reported that this task elicited interesting, concerned, supportive, mature and thoughtful work.

Given the popularity of these tasks, there was, perhaps, a more palpable relationship between the amount of writing attempted and the incidence of weak grammar, spelling and punctuation.

2432/02 Different Cultures, Analysis and Argument

General Comments

Examiners reported that the performance of candidates on this year's examination was good. The entry of approximately 4,500 consisted of centres familiar to OCR. The entry clearly reflects the intentions of most centres to use 2432 for the terminal examinations, but we were pleased to note in the January session that an increasing number of centres are using the flexibility of entry, in terms of tier and time, to their advantage. Evidence from Examiners indicated that candidates had been thoroughly prepared and coped very successfully with the demands of the paper.

The time available to candidates in the examination did not appear to affect their ability to offer responses of sufficient length to reward positively and, in fact, most candidates made excellent use of their time in dealing with all three tasks.

The majority of centres had decided to use the *Opening Worlds* anthology to prepare candidates for this examination. Although this involved working on two texts, responses revealed some good understanding of how writers make the openings to stories effective and how characters are shown learning or not learning important lessons. Centres should note that Question 1 no longer requires candidates to explore both the passage and the rest of the story it is taken from. They must, however, continue to examine a second story from the list specified at the top of the page. Many candidates will feel that further exploration of the text from which the passage is taken is most useful in responding to the task, especially in terms of exploring the effectiveness of the opening, but the constraints of time make the study of all three elements (passage, rest of text and second story) very demanding. Consequently, there is no penalty for the candidate who selects references exclusively from the passage, before going on to deal with a second tale.

Question 1 proved particularly popular, perhaps because the candidates were given the opportunity to explore a powerful passage with considerable scope for analysis of the language used by the writer, as well as a story of their own choice. Indeed, all six tales were used in responses to this question on the effectiveness of the opening with some perceptive analysis of language. Similarly, Question 2 was well tackled with candidates able to select texts that they had personally enjoyed, revealing a genuine engagement with characters and the extent to which they had learned a lesson. Examiners were instructed to be understanding of the candidates' interpretation of what were deemed to be lessons, some candidates exploring them in terms of education, and this enabled them to use all six stories effectively.

Questions 3 and 4 were tackled confidently by a smaller number of candidates, the short novel enabling centres to prepare individuals thoroughly for the demands of the questions. Responses were equally balanced across the two questions whereas in previous sessions Question 3 has proved by far the more popular. The nature of these very open tasks encouraged the vast majority of candidates to respond with insight and understanding.

Examiners were pleased to see that *Things Fall Apart* had been chosen by a significant number of centres for study. Question 5 was the more popular as it enabled candidates to focus on the ways in which Okonkwo is shown as a man in conflict with his people, a presentation so well defined in the passage and central to the way things fall apart for him in the rest of the novel. However, those who attempted Question 6 engaged effectively with the responsibility of the white man for the way things fall apart in Umofia, selecting those events that they felt contributed most effectively to the ending. A few explored the extent to which other factors also contributed to the downfall of the Ibo culture and this, balanced with consideration of the impact of the arrival

of the white man, led to some convincing responses. The very precise nature of the tasks produced a wide variety of thoughtful responses.

The performance of candidates on Questions 7 and 8 was very good. The opportunity to write a letter to their Head or Principal arguing their point of view regarding the cancellation of a visit to a theme park produced many heartfelt responses. Whilst the majority argued passionately against the cancellation, a few adopted the more unusual approach of defending the stance taken by the Head/Principal, some choosing to take on the persona of a teacher or parent. However, robust arguments were promoted by both camps who frequently explored the increasing control health and safety regulations are having on people's lives and the injustice of depriving students of a well earned end of year reward, articulating their thoughts in well constructed responses. Consequently, arguments were frequently passionate and convincing.

Equally, the opportunity to muse upon the ways in which the world could be made safer produced many engaging responses in which candidates drew upon a powerful, personal perspective with many moving on to examine how in global terms the world could be improved. Examiners felt that the stimulus material was particularly helpful this year. In a few centres a rather odd habit of candidates underlining words and marking "sp" in the margin as if to identify their own spelling errors for the examiner seemed to have crept in; ironically, these were not always misspelt and there were often many other errors not identified in this way.

There was some evidence that a few candidates had been entered for the wrong tier of the examination for this session. Centres are advised once more that they should not risk entering their candidates if their performance is likely to fall below what is required for an award at this tier.

Comments on Individual Questions

SECTION A

*(1) How does the writer make the opening of the story effective, here and in **one other story** from the list above?*

&

*(2) How do the writers show characters learning or not learning important lessons in any **two** of the stories from the list above?*

The most successful candidates were able to relate their knowledge of the text to the main thrust of the questions and provide coherent, structured and sometimes incisive analysis, characterised by comments referring back to the ideas of how the writers make the opening to their stories effective and how they show characters learning or not learning important lessons. Indeed, Examiners felt that the powerful language used to create mood and the human emotions captured in the passage in Question 1 produced many excellent responses, with some candidates very clear as to the techniques used by the writer to foreshadow the difficulties faced by Naraian and, particularly Cathy, later in the story. However some candidates limited their responses needlessly by taking the 'opening' of a story to refer to the very first sentences only, even of the given *The Young Couple* extract. Some candidates even felt they had to pretend they didn't know the rest of the story, leaving answers hanging by saying, "We wonder what will happen next..." or the ubiquitous, "And it makes you want to read on...". The idea that the effectiveness of an opening might be judged by relating it to the later developments therefore became lost.

Question 2 enabled candidates to spend their time very profitably on responses that revealed genuine understanding of how and why characters either did or did not learn important lessons, although some focussed on ones which could be considered incidental rather than central to the story. Undoubtedly the best responses bore the thrust of the task in mind at all times. Certainly

all six stories provided rich material upon which candidates might draw, with the very open nature of the task frequently encouraging a personal and original response.

In the middle range, some candidates, even when their knowledge of the texts was very sound, found it difficult to shape what they knew to the needs of the question. Often, what were appropriate and quite sharp insights lost their immediacy because their relevance to the question was left implicit rather than being explicitly stated. In dealing with the passage in Question 1, candidates frequently made reference to the descriptions of the flat and neighbouring courtyards and mausoleum as well as to the sky and trees, but did not explore how either these or the descriptions of Cathy are effective in setting up the plot, themes or relationships in the story.

Centres are advised to impress on their candidates that any comments must be directly related to the question if they are to make the most of their obvious understanding of texts. Similarly, an imbalance in the quality of analysis between the two stories was a feature of responses which showed promise; centres are advised to encourage candidates to spread their time evenly over the two stories.

At the lower end of the range was a minority of candidates who had clearly struggled to see beyond the mere narrative, indeed they reproduced much of it in their attempts to formulate a relevant response to either task. Once again, Examiners were concerned that some candidates were struggling under a range of misconceptions or merely selected a single concrete feature of the opening (such as the enthusiasm of Naraian or, what they interpreted incorrectly at this stage, as Cathy's boredom) that they considered appropriate to the story without explaining its impact on events. Such responses were often quite repetitive with little to reward.

Misconceptions in Question 2 included Leela learning not to lie or her parents learning not to judge others, whilst other candidates made assumptions that are not evident in the text, such as Bolan learning not to steal and Clement that he had to work for what the money he needed. Centres must ensure that the short stories are not seen as an easy alternative to the study of a full novel/novella. Candidates must experience an engaged study of all six stories if they are to be fully prepared for this examination.

A further limitation of scripts in the middle and lower ranges was over-long quotation. Candidates should be advised that Examiners are looking for succinct references and are not in the habit of awarding high marks to scripts which pad out an answer with quotations spanning six or seven lines. It is rare that such responses genuinely focus on the task. There was also evidence of paraphrasing and reiteration of text; candidates would quote and then rephrase the quotation without commenting significantly.

A final cause of concern which arose from answers in the middle and lower ranges was specifically evident in responses to the writers' use of language in making the openings effective in Question 1. There was a marked tendency towards technique spotting, with candidates confidently identifying similes, metaphors etc., but then being unable to explain how they created a specific effect. Certainly the foreboding evident in the symbolic reference to "all the things that would later become violent and hot" was often missed.

Examiners were pleased to note that candidates selecting stories for analysis outside the six identified at the top of the Question 1/Question 2 page was extremely rare indeed. Centres are advised that such responses would be penalised. Candidates must respond to questions using the specified stories for the paper.

(3) *Explore the range of emotions Hemingway reveals in Santiago, here and elsewhere in the novel.*

&

(4) *How does Hemingway show the ways in which Santiago and Manolin benefit from their relationship with each other?*

The most successful responses offered a genuine engagement with the text and a keen eye for short, pertinent references to back up comments which were entirely focused on the question. The best responses to Question 3 identified and explored the range of emotions revealed in Santiago in the passage before broadening out to identify these and others in the rest of the novella. Answers to Question 4 were detailed and thoughtful, particularly in dealing with the mutual benefits to Manolin and Santiago of their relationship in practical and emotional terms.

Middle range candidates had a clear understanding of the characterisation and relationships in *The Old Man and the Sea*, and were able to provide sufficient textual support for their answers, although much was implied rather than being made explicit. Equally, a large number of candidates failed to go very far beyond the passage which was evidently self penalising.

Less successful candidates frequently fell into a narrative which was seldom supported by explicit textual reference. Responses at this level were brief or extremely repetitive, failing to convince the Examiner that there was any genuine understanding of how the passage highlighted Santiago's differing emotions, or went beyond explaining what he did and – to some extent – why.

(5) *How does Achebe show Okwonkwo to be a man in conflict with his people, here and elsewhere in the novel?*

&

(6) *How does Achebe show the arrival the white man to be responsible for the way things fall apart in Umuofia?*

There were many outstanding responses to these tasks. The best examined in considerable detail in Question 5 the conflict between Okwonkwo and his people as shown in the reaction to his beating of his wife in the week of peace before moving out into the rest of the novel to examine the other ways in which he is increasingly at odds with his culture. Certainly this passage presented candidates with much useful material regarding the customs and beliefs of the Ibo people and the potential harm Okonkwo causes from which to build a wholly relevant response. Candidates often showed insight in their exploration of what drove Okonkwo into an increasing isolation from his people.

Equally, in Question 6, there was perceptive understanding of the impact of the new religion and laws brought by the white man, together with Okonkwo's hostile reaction to them, in being responsible for the ways things fall apart. In both cases, candidates revealed genuine engagement with the whole text through short, pertinent references which were invariably focused on the question.

Middle range responses had some grasp in their response to Question 5 of how Achebe reveals Okonkwo to be in conflict with his people, often referring to the more straightforward points relating to his beating his wife and failing to heed the warning not to bear a hand in the killing of Ikemefuna. In Question 6 they were able to identify some of the actions of the white man and to see the immediate impact on the tribe, but often failed to support their comments with pertinent reference and quotation. These very accessible tasks should have encouraged a very close study of the text where Okonkwo's increasing conflict with his people and the impact of the white man on Ibo culture are so clearly captured for the reader.

Less successful candidates struggled to find useful references in the extract and text. Their scripts were almost invariably marked by very superficial analysis that lost focus on the tasks. Unsupported narrative was very much in evidence in responses that were frequently very short.

SECTION B

(7) How could your world be made safer?

Examiners reported very good performances on this question with candidates constructing engaged, analytical responses. The generally confident use of connectives to structure thought and expression, referred to in previous reports to centres, benefited candidates considerably in rationalising their considerations.

The responses of the most successful candidates were often wide ranging, analytical and thought provoking, balancing the personal perspective of the dangers they have faced to date with powerful comparisons with suggestions of how to improve the safety, often broadening out to a global view of the world today. Whilst they recognised the advantages and disadvantages of modern technology, often commenting effectively on how technology itself threatens personal safety, candidates also reflected on the impact of simple consideration for others. Here, responses were frequently presented in virtually flawless English with a mature range of vocabulary and expression. At this level candidates invariably introduced a range of dangers and potential solutions which they interwove with the stimulus material in a logical structure with a clearly identifiable effective opening and a strong personal summation.

Responses from the middle and lower ranges, on the other hand, tended to rely heavily on the importance of a few very obvious examples of dangers they faced and sometimes rather extreme ways of dealing with them (bringing back the death penalty and lengthy prison sentences along with fitting CCTV cameras everywhere), or did little more than paraphrase the stimulus material provided, or were inclined to lose themselves in a lengthy account of a dangerous situation they have faced, with the outcome that they made little pertinent comment on it. One candidate notably suggested "The streets could be made safer if gangs of youths in hoodies who drink, swear and fight were moved on" before reflecting "But what would I do then of a Friday night?"

(8) Your school/college has decided to cancel a trip to a theme park because of health and safety concerns.

Write a letter to the Head/Principal arguing your own point of view.

High level candidates revealed a strong, persuasive tone, frequently marked by a confident use of rhetorical questions and a well judged application of exclamation marks to enliven their work. Here, responses were very convincing in their appeal to the Head or Principal of their school/college and covered arguments ranging from the safety of the theme park which would have regular checks made, to the students' need for trips to motivate and reward them for their hard work, especially in preparation for GCSE. Such work was invariably influenced by cogent argument, with a number agreeing with the cancellation and showing an understanding of the responsibility of the school/college for the students' safety.

The majority found an appropriate tone of address and a rational development of ideas. Certainly the task encouraged many outstanding responses with much reflection on how the trip could be undertaken in a safe and fun way. Clearly the topic was close to candidates' hearts and they were determined to encourage the head to understand their sense of injustice and to reject the ridiculous controls being exerted by health and safety regulations.

Candidates at middle and lower levels were at ease with the subject matter of the task and clearly enjoyed responding in an indignant way to the cancellation of the trip, but frequently failed to convince Examiners that their arguments had any persuasive merit. The instructions clearly asked for a targeted, personal response which should have opened up many opportunities for persuasion. However, responses at this level frequently descended into a rant about how often rides are checked for safety or lost the link to health and safety altogether and became fixated on the head wanting to cancel because of bad behaviour or introduced random material about the Head wanting to keep their deposits. The tone was not always appropriate and so the idea of polite persuasion was lost, leading to statements such as "I am writing to tell you that you are a back-stabbing louse..." and threats of the chaos and mayhem that will result if the trip is not reinstated, to the extent of one head being advised that she will "rot in Hell" and that Year 11 will dance on her grave.

Centres are advised to ensure that candidates are aware that the appropriate tone and form are key indicators to Examiners with regard to the award of marks in such tasks.

This task enabled candidates to give a very clear indication of their abilities and Examiners noted that a significant majority of responses revealed genuine engagement with the issues surrounding school trips, showing awareness of the implications for schools of health and safety regulations, cogently brought together with considerable maturity of thought and expression.

2433 Literary Heritage and Imaginative Writing (Foundation and Higher tier)

General Comments

Evidence suggests that candidates were largely entered for the correct tier, most Foundation Tier answers reflecting Band 5 qualities and below, or a mixed performance with Band 4 on either the Literature or the writing task, but rarely both. Higher Tier scripts tended to reflect Band 5 and above, although there was a disturbing number of Band 6, even 7 answers in the Higher Tier, especially in Section B. Our impression was that these were largely due to an inadequate grasp of examination techniques rather than a lack of understanding of the literary texts, although some candidates clearly struggled with the poetry.

It is dangerous to enter candidates for the Higher Tier whose performance can veer below Band 6, as they are then in danger of falling below an E grade, and thus scoring zero on this paper. Success in these papers depends on a disciplined approach, a wise allocation of time, and a strictly explicit focus on the question. Very generalised or verbose responses to the Literature tasks, including lengthy introductions, repetitive conclusions, and irrelevant empathic or philosophical reflections are counterproductive.

SECTION A

*(1) Copy out the sentence below, and then continue the story. **Show the thoughts and feelings of the narrator.*** (Foundation Tier)

*(1) Copy out the sentence below, and then continue the story, **exploring the thoughts and feelings of the narrator.*** (Higher Tier)

Nothing could have prepared me for what I was about to find out.

In assessing narrative skills across both tiers, examiners are essentially looking for the ability to organise and structure ideas into a coherent piece of writing that communicates clearly and is convincing and controlled in its development of a chosen genre. Hence, Band 3 and above responses are expected to use helpful paragraphing and punctuation, choose vocabulary and a range of sentence structures carefully for their effect on the reader, and give an overall impression of confidence and security. Weaker candidates who make too many syntactical errors for a Band 4 may still achieve a strong Band 5 for clear development and some ambitious use of vocabulary or other narrative devices to influence the reader.

Although the build up of suspense can be one such means, the effectiveness is marred if the result is confusing. Some plots proved too complex, flashbacks too bewildering, switches in and out of stream of consciousness writing too abrupt, or the necessary narrative clues at convenient stages were omitted so that the reader lost track of what was actually happening or, as a continuation from the opening sentence, what was about to be found out.

In developing a suitable narrative situation, there is an opportunity for candidates to use their imagination; however, continuations that ventured yet again into haunted houses, blood-thirsty monsters, and superman feats were rarely convincing. The most successful tended to be those who developed the situation in terms of family, school, or common human situations, including a few who featured a war situation in Afghanistan, and one who very movingly reacted to the news of an arranged marriage. There were several very sad, but sometimes quite uplifting responses to test results confirming an unwanted pregnancy, terminal cancer, or some other life-

threatening condition, news of serious accidents or illness of close family members or friends, and discoveries of infidelity, adoption and the identity of real parents. In contrast, there were joyful discoveries: lottery wins, the offer of a place in a football academy/team, or the top award in a talent competition.

In some centres a very popular scenario was the day of the examination results: while this gave ample scope to focus on thoughts and feelings, both prior to and as a consequence of the discovery, weak responses tended to become rather repetitive in both ideas and use of vocabulary, and sometimes confusing as it became less and less clear what had actually been expected. Full credit was given to the development of a strong narrative voice, but candidates should be aware that if they rely entirely on the narrator's view as expressed in colloquial English throughout, they are not allowing themselves the opportunity to demonstrate the full extent of their language skills.

The hallmark of Band 6 responses and below was a failure to write in the specified genre, or to establish at any point what the narrator intended doing, possibly focusing on feelings, but in a rather generalised and/or repetitive way, or conversely launching into action, ignoring the narrator's thoughts and the need to ensure development stems from the opening lines. Weak responses could be too chatty, rambling, or over-reliant on dialogue. Technically, this resulted in erratic or non-existent paragraphing, even where there were constant changes of speakers, and a failure to recognise, let alone punctuate, sentence endings correctly.

Where candidates were uncomfortable using the tense construction given in the opening sentences, they incurred little penalty provided they quickly settled into a tense sequence they could use with consistency. However, in trying to explore thoughts, some candidates kept switching from present to past and from indirect to direct speech in an effort to produce a stream of consciousness writing. While some candidates could adopt this style most effectively, for others this also led to choosing basic, rather repetitive vocabulary and sentence structures, frequent tense and other syntactical errors, and a neglect of narrative detail that would have created some helpful atmosphere for the reader.

Other weaknesses included too little development (well under 200 words) to demonstrate the ability to sustain an appropriate mood, no sense of direction so that the ending appeared too abrupt or contradictory to what had gone before or, conversely, going on to such a length that the quality showed a marked deterioration. Those who produced 4 - 5 sides, ignoring the recommendation to work on only a section or mini chapter of a story (2-3 sides maximum), not only succeeded in weakening the good impression created by their best sections of writing, but also left themselves seriously short of time to devote to the Literature questions.

Many such scripts had to leave out one question altogether, or produced short, superficial responses to Section B. Although we mark this question as first draft writing, candidates are advised to allow time to correct as many errors as possible, to demonstrate their potential level of accuracy.

SECTION B

Shakespeare

In both tiers, most answers were able to engage with the question, and demonstrate some understanding of their chosen play. Many, however, wasted valuable time explaining laboriously what they were intending to do, then repeating this in similar form as a conclusion, without developing the middle section in any real detail. Others, similarly, under-achieved through adopting a wide-sweeping generalised approach (not to be confused with a perceptive overview), with little attempt to support their ideas with some detailed reference to the text. While background information on Shakespeare's ideas and beliefs, his time, and audience expectations can be invaluable in enabling the candidate to reach a more perceptive

understanding of the play, candidates cannot afford to devote whole paragraphs to this instead of focusing immediately on the demands of the question. Similarly, while genuine engagement or interaction with the play is rewarding, there is neither time nor place in such a tightly timed examination for personal reflection or attempts to draw analogies to current situations.

Much Ado About Nothing

(2a) Do characters in Much Ado About Nothing get what they deserve? Write about any **two** of the following:

- Don John
- Claudio
- Beatrice

(Foundation Tier)

(2a) How effective do you find Shakespeare's ending to the play Much Ado About Nothing? (Higher Tier)

Although most responses to the Higher Tier question showed a sound understanding of the main issues that were resolved at the end of the play, examiners were disappointed to find, despite some sophisticated and assured exceptions, very few were prepared to look at thematic significance or to question whether either of the 2 marriages would provide lasting happiness. Weak responses focused exclusively on Beatrice and Benedick, ignoring all the dramatic significance of the marriage of Hero and Claudio. There was some misunderstanding of the last 4 lines of the play, several candidates thinking that Don John was returning, supported by an armed force.

Foundation Tier candidates usually started well, with firm opinions, especially about Don John. The hallmark of weaker responses was a tendency to lapse into narrative mode and forget the opening line of argument, a failure to include a second character, especially where Beatrice was the first, or show only a sketchy understanding of the play. Outlines of Don John's plottings were often vague or confused, and conclusions on Claudio's deserts were similarly vague or not convincing. Examiners accepted the candidate's judgement provided it was explained and given textual support.

(2b) What are the difficulties faced by Hero and how are they overcome in the play Much Ado About Nothing? (Foundation Tier)

(2b) In Much Ado About Nothing explore how Hero plays an important role, even though she says very little. (Higher Tier)

Responses showed considerable engagement with Hero, in both tiers, many demonstrating detailed knowledge of the play as they emphasised how often she features in other characters' conversations, and what a key role she plays in the tricking of Beatrice and Benedick. The best highlighted her dramatic and thematic significance. The weakest, still across both tiers, lapsed into a narrative account of the plot against her, losing focus on her role or her problems, or they explored only one moment in the play, or they referred in very general and unsupported terms to her involvement in the plot and the fact that she was proved innocent of the accusations against her. Some responses lost sight of her altogether as they discussed what happened to Beatrice and/or Claudio. A disciplined approach to focus and time management was particularly important in this essay.

The best answers in the Foundation Tier clearly outlined Hero's problems of being married without the benefits of a proper courtship and the development of trust, and of being unable to defend herself against accusations so unexpected, in a male-dominated society, where no-one will listen to her or tell her about the evidence on which these were founded. Credit was given to

any attempt to explain how they were overcome, as this was set to test a wider understanding of the play. Many were clearly able to see the role of Friar Francis and the advantages of playing for time during which the truth might be uncovered, in allowing people to believe Hero was dead. Others gave credit to Dogberry and the watchmen for finally divulging Don John's plotting with Borachio.

Romeo and Juliet

(3a) Write about **one** or **two** occasions when the friendship between Romeo and Mercutio affects what happens later in the play *Romeo and Juliet*. (Foundation Tier)

(3a) How does Shakespeare make the relationship between Romeo and Mercutio important in the play *Romeo and Juliet*? (Higher Tier)

Most of the candidates who chose this question demonstrated a sound understanding of the friendship between Romeo and Mercutio, providing evidence of Mercutio's efforts to help Romeo get over Rosaline, and to fight Tybalt in his stead.

However, whereas the simpler, more prescriptive question for the Foundation Tier did ensure that most responses indicated the importance in terms of plot - Romeo attends the ball and thus meets Juliet; Mercutio's death provokes Romeo to avenge, resulting in banishment and the tragic sequence of events - the weakest responses in the Higher Tier failed to move beyond a fairly narrative account of their activities together.

The key discriminator in Higher Tier responses was the degree of focus on 'importance': a clear account in terms of plot could achieve up to a Band 3; those who demonstrated a more perceptive insight into its thematic importance, supported by apt quotation, (such as Mercutio's curse, and Romeo's recognition 'O, I am fortune's fool!'), or looked at how their exchanges provide humour, while highlighting the sensitive, romantic side of Romeo, even including his premonition of disaster, were awarded at least a Band 2. Essentially we were looking for an understanding of that friendship, why Mercutio felt it necessary to defend Romeo's honour, why Romeo felt he was to blame for the death, and, if Mercutio's curse was mentioned, why it was significant. Some responses referred to it as Mercutio's change of feeling towards Romeo. Too many showed confusion with film versions, and gunshot wounds.

The most common reasons why many Foundation Tier responses did not achieve a Band 4 were a failure to make points precisely and/or provide aptly chosen support from the text, a failure to develop or explain the relevance of the 2 or 3 basic comments offered as a response, a loss of focus in an entirely narrative response that expected the examiner to identify the causal links, or, in the worst cases, a confusion between Benvolio and Mercutio, and/or demonstrating only a very sketchy understanding of the play.

(3b) How important is *The Prince* in the play *Romeo and Juliet*?

Write about:

- what he says and does
- his effect on other characters.

(Foundation Tier)

(3b) Discuss the role of *The Prince* in the play *Romeo and Juliet*. (Higher Tier)

Again, the Foundation Tier wording proved helpful to potential Band 4 candidates in that it steered them into considering the effect *The Prince* had on others in the play, for example his banishment of Romeo sets in motion the tragic chain of events, enraging the Capulets, leading Juliet into a very vulnerable situation, and impeding communication between the lovers; his

threats after the earlier street brawls leave him little choice but at best to allow banishment rather than execution as Romeo's punishment, yet show he can only bring temporary peace to Verona.

His judgement at the end ensures all concerned recognise the part they and the feud played in the tragic outcome. Higher Tier responses proved competent in assessing his role in Verona, a figure of authority, one who judges crime and punishment, and whose prime concern is peace and his citizens' welfare. However, too few looked at his role in the play in terms of his effect on the plot or in how his inability to bring an end to the feud links with the words of The Prologue and the thematic issues, ie, if his stern measures cannot bring a lasting peace, there is no alternative to the sacrifice of the 'star-crossed lovers' to achieve this.

The best responses seized the opportunity to demonstrate a perceptive overview of the play, supported by carefully chosen quotation: the weakest, in both tiers, were either very undeveloped or focused on a narrative account of the brawl and his pronouncements in the first scene, or became side-tracked in a discussion of how biased he might be in his judgement of Romeo when it had been The Prince's kinsman he had been avenging against Tybalt.

Poetry pre-1914 or post-1914: Opening Lines (OCR)

Regardless of the tier entered, to achieve a Band 4 mark, candidates must be able to show a straightforward understanding of the 2 poems selected, a generally consistent focus on the question, and the beginnings of a response to the poet's use of language/ techniques. Although credit is given for any attempt to analyse language as relevant to the question, answers that fail to show understanding of the ideas/ feelings/ tone of the poem as a whole are self-limiting. Examiners will accept a wide range of interpretation of feelings/tone provided some support from the text is given.

Although there were some impressive responses, examiners were often disappointed by the considerable misunderstanding shown, sometimes giving the impression that these poems had not been recently revised, if studied at all during the course, or that candidates had mistakenly turned to Section C (Question 4) war poems when they had been prepared for Section H. Some responses made a valiant attempt to look at structure and other devices, but often lacked the total understanding or confidence required to explain their effect on the reader.

Another weakness was to supply several lines of quotation followed by a simplistic 'translation', which showed at best a very basic understanding of the poet's views. Conversely, several students based their response to a whole poem on just one quotation, allowing them no chance to develop their ideas or show a full understanding. Answers offering only one poem had to be penalised. The few who offered all 3 were usually self-limiting in that there was insufficient time to demonstrate the ability to analyse detail.

Although answers were received from sections C, D and H in the Higher Tier, the most popular was Section H: Poetry of the 1914-1918 War (ii). For written coursework combining Literature and Language requirements, candidates are required to compare poems. However, in this examination, a comparison is not required, and, although some candidates may find comparing helps them to sustain an analytical approach, the pitfalls were all too obvious for many who were reduced to identifying trivial similarities and differences, (for example, the River Thames is referred to in both Wordsworth's and Blake's poems), or in finding similarities that are not there (for example, in *Perhaps* and *Reported Missing*, both speakers hope their loved ones will return) instead of focusing on the question and analysing a few details in depth.

SECTION C: WAR

(4) How do the poets use words and images to show the effects of war on people and communities in **two** of the following poems? (Foundation Tier)

(4) Explore some of the ways in which the poets convey the effects of war on people and communities in **two** of the following poems (Higher Tier).

(page 35)	Newbolt	<i>Vitae Lampada</i>
(page 38)	Southey	<i>After Blenheim</i>
(page 39)	Whitman	<i>Come up from the fields father...</i>

Although the best responses were impressive, most people struggled with this section. Southey and Whitman are both long poems from which it is essential just to select relevant detail, and keep a direct focus on the question rather than lapsing into a narrative account of each stage of the conversation between Old Kaspar and his grandchildren, or the mother and father's return into the house.

The best responses seized on the irony that the emphasis on and repetition of 'famous victory' suggests the futility not glory of death in battle when neither the cause nor the good effects could be remembered, and there was widespread evidence of the suffering in the community, including the child's discovery of the skull.

In Whitman it is the suffering of the family that is explored through the contrast between the 'vital and beautiful' autumn scene and the dramatic tension as news of the death is received and then the withering away of the mother through her grieving. Newbolt features the heavy losses sustained by English youth, and families, as 'the sand of the desert is sodden red', and the irony that it is seen as an extension of the school playing field and the schoolboy ethos that each soldier should 'play up! and play the game!' Although all aspire to glory, the picture given is of wave after wave of innocent young men, inspired by their school training, facing impossible odds.

The question is worded 'people and communities' to enable candidates to choose the 2 poems they like or know best from a given 3. They are not necessarily expected to be able to find examples of both in each poem, although both are present in the Southey. Whitman clearly focuses on just the family. Some candidates found Newbolt less easy to define in terms of the question, but it could be argued that the 'people' referred to are the schoolboys/ soldiers themselves and possibly the schools which keep sending them forth are the communities. Examiners mark positively, and candidates should not be afraid to define the 'people' they are basing their answer on, nor feel anxious if only one element is present in any one poem.

SECTION D: TOWN AND COUNTRY

(5) How do the poets use words and images to convey strong impressions of London in **two** of the following poems? (Foundation Tier)

(5) Explore some of the ways in which the poets convey strong impressions of London in **two** of the following poems. (Higher Tier)

(page 53)	Wordsworth	<i>Composed Upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802</i>
(page 53)	Meynell	<i>A Dead Harvest in Kensington Gardens</i>
(page 56)	Blake	<i>London</i>

The most popular in both tiers were the Wordsworth and Blake poems. Sadly Meynell's depiction of the futility of town life was rarely understood, details such as the 'gold and grey' of the rows of

hay misapplied to the raked leaves. Similarities drawn with Wordsworth's emphasis on silence were of little help in determining the poet's main impression of London. Most responses identified Wordsworth's love of the beauty, brightness and peaceful atmosphere of London; comparisons with Blake established also the freedom and 'natural' state of the Thames, the presence of fields and countryside, and the absence of noise and pollution in the early morning as opposed to dark night time wanderings. However, few could identify and comment helpfully on the effects of the use of personification and the sonnet form.

Blake proved accessible at many levels. The best responses, with confidence, analysed the picture of widespread corruption drawn from images such as 'chartered Thames', 'blackening Church', and 'blood down palace walls', and the bitter fate suggested by 'blights with plagues the marriage hearse'. More straightforward responses could still show clear understanding of Blake's feelings of anger and sorrow at the widespread suffering he could see and hear everywhere, emphasised through his repetition of 'every', his details of sounds in 'cry', 'sigh', 'tear' and 'curse', and they could also gain some credit for recognising exploitation of children in details such as 'chimney-sweeper' and 'youthful harlot'.

Only those who tried too hard to find general similarities and contrasts with Wordsworth's London, or who focused exclusively on stanzas and rhyming patterns without producing a convincing explanation of their effect, failed to reach Band 4 or above on this poem.

SECTION G: HOW IT LOOKS FROM HERE

(6) *How do the poets use words and images to present certain animals in unexpected ways in **two** of the following poems?* (Foundation Tier)

(6) *Explore how the poets present certain animals in unexpected ways in **two** of the following poems.* (Higher Tier)

(page 90)	Porter	<i>Mort aux Chats</i>
(page 91)	Logue	<i>Rat, O Rat...</i>
(page 96)	Hill	<i>The Hare</i>

There were very few responses to this question in either tier. They were so short, with relevance to the question at best implied, that examiners wondered whether they had been answered in error and as an unseen.

SECTION H: POETRY OF THE 1914-1918 WAR (ii)

(7) *How do the poets use words and images to show strong feelings about the death of soldiers in war, in **two** of the following poems?* (Foundation Tier)

(7) *Discuss some of the ways in which the poets present strong feelings about the death of soldiers in war in **two** of the following poems.* (Higher Tier)

(page 110)	Owen	<i>The Parable of the Old Man and the Young</i>
(page 111)	Brittain	<i>Perhaps -</i>
(page 112)	Keown	<i>Reported Missing</i>

This was the most popular section across both tiers. The best responses to Owen's poem clearly understood the symbolism, but few went on to explore the use of any significant detail, such as 'half the seed of Europe', and 'one by one'. The weakest across both tiers either failed to see how Abram's story reflected strong feelings about the death of soldiers, and therefore just retold the story, or they missed the significance of the Angel's warning and thought the poem was presenting the death of soldiers as a noble sacrifice, God's will.

Brittain was better understood, but confusion arose when some candidates, trying to find similarities with *Reported Missing*, thought she was still hoping her lover would return. The weakest actually suggested this was written from the point of view of the soldiers who were hoping that one day they would return to normal life.

Keown's poem caused similar confusion as to whether she knew he was dead. Examiners credited only interpretations and associations that could be justified by textual support. However, many responses demonstrated real engagement with Keown's poem, analysing selection from the text with crisp assurance and obvious enjoyment. What was disappointing was the number of responses that could identify the alliterative use of 'piteous platitudes of pain' and the repetition of 'I laugh', without being able to begin to explain their effect on the reader.

Similarly many candidates wasted valuable time identifying rhyme schemes, structure and sonnet form without appreciating their effect; some commented on the use or absence of devices, such as personification, similes, and metaphors without explaining how they conveyed feelings or reactions, or showing any appreciation of the poem as a whole.

2434 Literary Heritage and Imaginative Writing

General Comments

Again it was generally pleasing to see the diligent and conscientious approach of centres in applying the assessment criteria. Teachers seemed confident in the application of assessment criteria, and the detailed annotated comments on course work showed the hard work of the majority of teachers in delivering the coursework component.

This examination saw the use of electronic forms and a number of centres that were contacted by email were able to despatch their folders extremely promptly.

In the majority of cases the coursework assessment forms were filled in accurately, and detailed teacher comments were helpful to moderators in establishing what mark had been awarded. Most centres did show the breakdown of marks for the writing piece, and this made the moderation process much easier. Teachers are to be complimented for the considerable time and effort that they make in completing and assessing final course work folders.

As always there was a number of small centres making minor errors and omissions in their general administration. Most common problems are marks not entered on the MS1 or marks on the candidate's folder that bears no similarity to the mark on the MS1. What is worrying is that it is often the same minority of centres that are making the same mistakes every year, and they are clearly paying little attention to the report that they receive after the previous moderation process.

Most teachers, however, are now very skilled at applying the assessment criteria accurately, and fewer centres than ever had mark changes. Most teachers applied the criteria consistently and paid attention to the full range of marks within each band. However a very small minority of centres are still submitting course work assignments which show little sign of helpful annotation for the moderator or how the final mark has been arrived at.

AO 3.2 READING.

A0 3.2 (iv) and (v) again proved to be the biggest differentiators. 3.2 (iv) selecting material and making cross references, was something only the most able candidates could do.

Response to Shakespeare.

The majority of centres again chose *Romeo and Juliet* or *Macbeth*, but there were also some interesting responses to the *Othello* and *Twelfth Night*.

Candidates seemed generally confident in understanding plot, themes and character, and the more able candidates were able to comment on language and its effect. This time there were a number of new tasks which allowed the candidates to make original and critical observations. The tasks that are set are often the key to establishing the real potential of the student: "Who is to blame for the tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet*", often prevents this as candidates are drawn into a much too general response. One centre submitted some outstanding responses to "Anti Semitism in *Othello*", which would not have been out of place in a final year degree thesis!!

Centres demonstrated a varied approach to the interpretation of "Shakespeare's stagecraft". Centres are reminded that "theatricality" is an awareness of the whole play, and candidates who submit detailed responses to specific scenes, with no reference to the context of this scene, are

often disadvantaged when applying the assessment criteria for higher Bands, if they cannot make some reference to a specific scene in the context of the whole play.

Generally, however, an increased number of candidates demonstrated an understanding of language and form and the range of more challenging tasks which had been set helped to encourage candidates to move away from these more narrative responses.

Response to poetry.

Again, as in June, 3.2 (v) was the greatest differentiator. On this occasion it is welcoming to report that fewer candidates were showing their expertise in merely identifying structural and presentational devices; many were able to show the effects of these devices upon the reader.

It is pleasing to report that centres are studying a greater variety of poems this year, although Tennyson and Owen are still popular, as is Wordsworth. Nearly all centres are now comparing only two poems and the best responses were those from candidates where the task set invited a response linked to specific assessment criteria. Some of the best responses were from candidates who had clearly been able to comment critically on both structure and effect and showed appreciation of the function of form and language in a way that was personal and enriching for the reader.

A03.3: Writing.

Again it was encouraging to see the diversity of responses with some candidates clearly taking the opportunity to display their creative talent. Centres seem to have encouraged more candidates to be diverse and create some really original "imagined situations"

There were some really interesting and engaging pieces, running the gamut of creative writing from simple narrative to biographies with a twist, gothic horror, rom-coms, whodunnits, science fiction and even a spaghetti western!!

Overall centres are to be congratulated for their generally consistent application of the assessment criteria in relation to a range of interesting and demanding tasks. Teachers are to be complimented for their hard work in providing practical and supportive feedback in their detailed annotation of students' work and for their dedication in making the course work component an interesting and challenging element of the GCSE course.

2435 Speaking and Listening

General Comments

The trend continues for the January series, with a number of Centres entering an entire cohort of candidates, rather than just seeing this series as a “resit” session. However, for many Centres, the January series is still treated as an opportunity for candidates to improve on their June result, often working in remodelled groups and on different activities.

Task setting

The activities covered by many of the January candidates crossed over with their Sixth Form studies, giving a relevance and immediacy to their performances; this often resulted in a marked improvement in achievement. There was evidence, therefore, of a range and variety of appropriate activities having been undertaken, many of them based on non-literary material. Often, the added boost came from developed confidence drawn from a more sympathetic and responsive audience.

Extra maturity resulted in an ability to analyse and reflect on experience and handle challenging material, synthesise complex items, organise points and challenge assumptions. Comments from Centres on performance often highlighted added skills in sensitive and sympathetic listening as a factor in improvement and a willingness to encourage quieter members to participate and then build on their contributions. Centres should bear these aspects in mind when setting “resit” tasks and avoid just repeating previous tasks with candidates, without adding specific opportunities.

The drama-focussed context was often more successful. Candidates, having been through the process, seemed to be clearer about what was required, and more skilled in adopting and sustaining a role realistically and convincingly. However many Centres still equate the drama-focussed context with drama/play based stimulus material.

As we are well into the life of this specification, it is easy to become complacent and not revisit or question the practice of previous years. This seems to have become a feature of task setting. The specification allows for the selection of the final activities for assessment from a number of tasks, given the fulfilment of the basic requirements, but some Centres seem to be treating this unit in a similar way to coursework for Reading and Writing. Good practice is rather to build up a profile of a candidate over the whole course, covering a number and range of tasks and then select the final three for assessment on a more individual basis. In adopting a “one choice fits all” approach, Centres may be disadvantaging their candidates.

This last point underlines the advice to Centres, to teach the skills needed for this component and to give candidates opportunities to develop and hone their skills. Many Centres now refer to Speaking and Listening work at Key Stage 3, feeding into Key Stage 4.

Record keeping

A key part of the process is record keeping. The majority of Centres maintain careful, thorough and clearly presented records, with a detailed and informative picture of progress and achievement, during the course; teachers' judgements are criteria-referenced and marks accurately awarded, both for the separate activities and for the final mark. A standard format for record keeping places the process within a systematic framework and ensures that all the required information is supplied to the external moderator.

The vast majority of Centres used the OCR form, designed to cover all the necessary elements. Many Centres now word process their forms, which is a welcomed trend. However it is a Centre's responsibility to ensure that external moderators are supplied with a comprehensive set of records; this unfortunately is not always the case and much time is wasted by the Moderator as a result.

The Application of the Criteria

Centres continue to display confidence and competence in assessing their candidates, as verified by centre visits. Here good practice in awarding the final mark includes balancing strengths and weaknesses, not just recording strengths. An explanation is given as to why candidates have failed to achieve the next band. This aspect of the application of the criteria is important as it allows Moderators to distinguish performance, particularly where there is bunching of marks.

Internal Standardisation Procedures

These continue to be secure and in many instances, rigorous and thorough: using cross moderation of groups, joint marking, reorganising of groups for assessment and department Inset training using filmed evidence. Attention, therefore, is strongly drawn to the Inter-Board Training and Guidance DVDs and videos, which should be used by Centres to confirm their own internally-set standards.

Worryingly many Centres failed to make reference to having used this support material. This material provides vital support for small Centres and for teachers working in isolation, without colleagues to discuss judgements. Centres now have a bank of support and guidance material to draw on, and it should be used by all Centres as part of their standardisation procedures.

Administration

As regards the administration of this unit, the majority of Centres were problem-free, but there was a sizeable number where all the relevant paperwork was not in place by the published deadline; these deadlines have now been unaltered for a number of years. As Centres move increasingly to systems where non-specialists Examinations Officers are the point of reference and dispatchers of coursework material to Moderators, it is vital for the smooth running of the process, that instructions regarding procedures and required forms, are read, understood and carried out by all relevant parties. In this series, the moderation process was protracted unduly by Centres waiting for Moderators to select the sample (it is Centre selected), and by not having records and forms ready for prompt dispatch.

Moderators are always grateful for early submissions. Similarly a grateful acknowledgement is made to those Centres where co-operation in assembling and checking documentation and prompt responses to requests enabled Moderators to meet their deadlines.

Conclusion

This unit continues to be successful and is often a real strength for candidates. All this is a testimony to the hard work and dedication of the teachers involved in preparing their students. As always teachers are to be complimented and thanked for their continuing commitment.

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