

HKDSE Literature in English Practice Papers Performance Report

The Literature Practice Papers were administered to a pilot study group of approximately 50 students per paper. The comments on performance below are based on these papers with specific reference to sample scripts labeled A to L.

Paper 1 (Set 1)

Section A Critical Analysis

Candidates were given a choice of two questions in this section which contained extracts from *Lord of the Flies* and/or *Othello*. A more or less equal number of candidates chose each question. For Question 1 candidates were given an extract from Chapter Seven of *Lord of the Flies* describing the boys' investigation of the 'beast from the air' and an extract from Act III, Scene 3 of *Othello* centering on the 'green-eyed monster' speech. Sub-question (i) invited comparison of these passages.

- (i) What is the role of beasts/monsters in the passages and in the works from which they come? (14 marks)

Stronger candidates attempting this question were expected to go beyond the extracts to write about beasts in general in the texts, their impact on the characters, and whether or not the characters themselves become beasts of a kind (as in Jack's and Othello's cases).

Script A was considered to be a borderline poor/average answer as it relies heavily on the descriptions from the passages and does not extend observations to the works as a whole. Although it makes the important point for *Lord of the Flies* that the monster is a product of the boys' inner fears, it is limited only to acknowledging Othello will change as jealousy takes a monstrous form inside him.

The second sub-question was:

- (ii) What are Ralph's and Othello's emotions and how do Golding and Shakespeare show them to us? (19 marks)

A simple catalogue of emotions would suffice by way of an answer, providing there

was some mention of the techniques employed by Golding and Shakespeare to convey these emotions. Unfortunately, in most cases, this was lacking, and in Script A, the candidate's performance was determined as particularly poor in this question, with their sometimes slipping into nonsensical statements such as: 'confusion...that makes him believe that the appearance of the creature cannot be clearly seen'.

Similarly, a lack of vocabulary or clear means of expression led to statements like: 'Othello's emotions are very emotional'.

Overall, it can be asserted that Script A is a likely example of a Level 1 performance.

For Question 2, candidates were provided with a long extract from the final chapter of *Lord of the Flies*. Those candidates who handled this question well clearly understood what the ironies were, while those who performed less well did so because they had a poor grasp of the meaning of irony.

Script B was considered to be a model answer in this respect and scored very highly. The candidate shows an in-depth knowledge of the text and the ability to draw on all the salient points in the passage that link to earlier events.

The second sub-question focused more on technique:

(ii) Show how the narrative point of view changes in the extract. (13 marks)

Candidates in general found this part more challenging, with many not entirely clear on what constituted a narrative point of view. While Script A was again determined as a good answer, there is one misstep with respect to Percival, whose point of view is *not* given, even though he speaks.

The third sub-question:

(iii) Explain the reference to *Coral Island* (line 67) made by the naval officer.
(7 marks)

showed a failure on the part of candidates to follow up on extra-textual references, to be precise, the novel by R. M. Ballantyne. In retrospect, it may have been a little unfair to expect candidates to be familiar with the text, but given that *Lord of the Flies* is a refutation of the lack of realism and bombastic imperialist values associated with

The Coral Island, the question itself was essentially legitimate. Even the writer of Script B had difficulty getting to grips with the question, scoring only averagely.

Overall, however, the candidate's work in Script B represents a Level 4/5 performance, a commendable achievement.

Section B Poetry

The Rattle Bag

The vast majority of candidates chose to answer Question 4 rather than Question 3, perhaps put off by the technique question regarding Sylvia Plath's use of half-rhyme in 'Pheasant'.

4. (i) 'Auden's style creates a distance between the reader and the emotion of the poem.' How far do you agree with this statement in relation to the two poems? (10 marks)

Interestingly, a more or less equal number of candidates chose to agree and disagree with the statement, but there was a shared difficulty in defining what elements of style created or could be perceived to create this distance, and indeed what the nature of the distance was.

Script C demonstrates this difficulty, with the candidate scoring only average marks attempting to explain vague notions like 'daily life images' (presumably wishing to draw attention to Auden's bathetic coupling of common phrasal verbs with cosmic bodies, e.g. 'the stars... put out. Pack up the moon..., etc.)

Sub-question (ii) was more straightforward:

- (ii) What similarities are there in content between the two poems? (6 marks)

In general candidates fared better on this question, which essentially required the recognition that both poems are about a lonely man surrounded by a colourless and inhospitable world, and with a lover far away, dead or having left.

The writer of Script C finds two valid points of comparison, the fact that both poems

are about 'loved ones' and convey a sense of loss or longing, though elaborates on these ideas rather clumsily and does not comment on the inhospitability of the worlds they inhabit. Scores awarded fell in the average range.

The candidate performed best on sub-question (iii):

- (iii) Would you stress the word 'He' or 'was' in line 9 of poem (A)?
Explain your choice. (4 marks)

This was an open question with no 'correct' answer and most candidates were able to provide some justification of their choice, mostly focusing on theme rather than sound patterns.

The writer of Script C here provided an effective summary of the impact of the poet's loved one on all aspects of his life, contrasted with the possible limitations of stressing 'was' instead.

Sub-question (iv) was also mostly well handled.

- (iv) How does the wanderer feel about his wandering in poem (B)? (4 marks)

Script C manages to capture the essence of the wanderer's feelings very competently, a suffocating loneliness alleviated by the hope of returning home again soon.

The overall probable Level of the candidate is difficult to determine because of the degree of variability in the answers to the sub-questions, though a by sub-question breakdown may be helpful here:

Probable Level: 1 on (i)
 3 on (ii)
 4 on (iii) and (iv)

Paper 1 (Set 2)

Section A Critical Analysis

Disappointingly, only two schools have thus far opted for the Set 2 texts so it is

difficult to generalize on candidates' performance. However, some samples of work were provided for the following Paper 1 Section A question, which involved extracts from Act Four of *The Crucible* detailing Proctor's confession and protection of Rebecca, and Chapter 17 of *The Year of Living Dangerously* in which Hamilton relates his growing inward sense of Java's emotional effect on him.

The first sub-question was:

- (i) What are the points of comparison between the two extracts? (11 marks)

Script D is the work of a candidate who shows an average general understanding of the extracts' structural importance and that a change of behaviour has occurred in Proctor and Hamilton.

For the second sub-question

- ii) What is Danforth trying to achieve in extract (A)? Why is this important to him? (11 marks)

the candidate's performance improves, scoring well with an articulate explanation of Danforth's predicament.

Unfortunately, this level of performance is not maintained with the final sub-question

- (iii) What is significant about Guy's way of expressing himself in the second paragraph of extract (B)? (11 marks)

where the candidate fails to establish how Hamilton has formed some connection with Indonesia and seems confused about where he is and who he's with at the time.

Overall, this failure towards the end renders the candidate's work of around a Level 3 standard.

Section B Poetry

100 Great Poets of the English Language

The most popular question in Section B: was 4, comparing Stevie Smith's 'Mr Over' with Ted Hughes' 'Pike'. There were three sub-questions:

- (i) In the two poems, in what ways and to what extent do the poets find death attractive? (10 marks)

Script E represents an average performance, the candidate identifying that 'Mr Over' sees death as an escape, but missing most of the irony. The candidate also identifies that Hughes admires the deadly perfection of the pike as a kind of beauty, but expresses this in a rather muddled way.

For the second sub-question

- (ii) Comment on the use of wordplay in poem (A). (7 marks)

typical weaknesses in dealing with poetic technique were evident and the candidate scored only averagely, limiting the interpretation of 'you' to God. There is, however, more than one interpretation of the phrase and the poem and this openness needs to be acknowledged. There is also no mention of wordplay other than that relating to 'over' and 'you'. These included: 'pray', meaning 'please' and the verb to speak to God; the idioms 'a drop in the ocean', 'a drop in the bucket'; the old-fashioned biblical 'spake'; and various liturgical phrases *Beati sunt mortui qui in Domino morientur* ('Happy are the dead who die in the Lord').

The third sub-question was a straightforward technique one:

- (iii) What atmosphere is Hughes trying to create in verses 8 – 11 of poem (B)? (7 marks)

Most candidates were able to answer substantially here, but the writer of Script E, like many, was let down by inappropriate choice of vocabulary which muddies the observations made. The atmosphere is neither 'ambigious' or 'ambiguous', nor is it 'dangerous' which is used in place of 'threatening'. This renders Script E an overall Level 3 performer.

Section C: Unseen Poetry

This section was shared by both Set 1 and Set 2 Papers and offered a choice of two questions on different poems.

Question 5 was almost entirely ignored by the candidates, perhaps because it appeared, on the surface, to be a more difficult poem. Instead, candidates opted for Question 6, perhaps because the poem 'Displaced' by Selina Libi Bjorlie concerned the conflict an Asian teenager living overseas has with her traditional mother.

- (i) What do we learn about mother and daughter in the first section of the poem?
How are they alike and different? (6 marks)

Most were able to identify the shared Buddhist heritage and the fact that there was antagonism between the two, though more could have been made of the details in the poem. Script F illustrates this shortcoming, the writer missing the significance of tiger balm reminding the mother of home and the Vick's Vapor rub suggesting domicile overseas, leading to an average score only.

A surprising number of candidates also failed to pick up on the correct answer to:

- (ii) How and why do the boys stretch their faces? (2 marks)

the writer of F proposing somewhat strangely that the boys do so because their faces are sunburned, and hence scoring no mark.

For:

- (iii) Why are the last two lines of verse II surprising? (4 marks)

all manner of reasons were given, and one or two candidates chose the wrong verse ending in their answers. The writer of Script F does not seem to make a distinction between those negative feelings that are inferred by the reader and what is actually stated by the persona, though at least the candidate senses the girl is unhappy and that pig-tails are not her idea.

The episode described in verse III provided a parallel for the girl's own experiences, but only the best candidates picked up on this in answering:

(iv) How does the story in verse III relate to the earlier part of the poem? (4 marks)

The writer of Script F in particular interprets the story as simply another example of the exercise of parental authority, not as a parable of the girl's own sense of displacement, and so scored no marks.

Script F, then, achieved a total score that could only be classified as a Level 1.

Paper 2 (Set 1)

Part I

Section A: Novel *Lord of the Flies*

Question 2 was the more popular of the two questions in this section, but as Question 1 offered candidates the opportunity to 'role-play', the sample script G relates to this one.

1. Imagine that the island becomes so famous that it's turned into a theme park. You are a guide taking a group of tourists around the island. Choose three places of significance you would visit and write what you would say about the places. You should avoid telling too much of the story.

The writer of G unfortunately adopts a hypothetical approach to the role-play 'If I were a guide...' immediately making it difficult to add any stylistic flourishes to a narrative tour of the island's interesting places. It also opens the answer more readily to storytelling, about which candidates are explicitly warned, but without obvious recourse to interpretation or recognition of irony. In addition, we are not sure if the forest is 'communicative' or 'uncommunicative' or quite what the 'coral cattle' refers to. (candidates would do well to practice place and character names in the set texts, as these are often wrongly spelt.) As such, Script G cannot be classified as anything but a borderline Level 2/Level 3 essay.

Section B: Play *Othello*

The majority of candidates chose to refer to Othello in answering Part II. Otherwise, for this section, Question 3 invited sophisticated argument, while 4 offered room for more speculative answers. As usual with Shakespeare, the better candidates were given an opportunity to shine, while the more average and the weaker showed only intermittent appreciation of the text.

3. How far do you agree that Iago's main technique is to use people's virtues against them?

Script H is the work of an extremely capable candidate. After a slightly clumsy start, the writer quickly grasps the question and systematically analyses Iago's manipulative skills. Observations cover most of those listed in the marking scheme (and even some that are not) and are well supported with quotation. Work of this quality is rare, especially with Shakespeare, and it was duly rewarded. It is a good example of a Level 5, possibly within the * category.

Section C: Film *The Painted Veil*

Of the two questions offered in this section, 5 proved to be the more popular.

5. How does the film visually represent the alienation and reconciliation (later growing together) of Kitty and Walter Fane?

Many candidates missed the fact that this is a film technique question and did not pay enough attention to the word 'visually' when answering. These candidates wrote at length about plot and character transformations and scored average to low marks.

Script I demonstrates a reasonable understanding of visual representation, but talk of motifs, the symbolism of light and darkness and long-shots is unconvincing (while a blurred figure in the background who should be listening but is obviously not might indicate alienation, distant figures crossing a landscape can be more to do with conveying setting than character interactions or lack thereof.) Although candidates are not expected to have a detailed knowledge of film technique vocabulary, some terms would have been useful here, such as *mis-en-scene*, framing, backlighting or soft-focus. Without it, Script I sits firmly in the Level 3 category.

Section D: Short Stories***Fiction: A Pocket Anthology***

As with *Othello*, the majority of candidates chose to refer to the short stories in answering Part II

7. What is the significance of the past in *Roman Fever*, *Seventeen Syllables*, and *Dead Men's Path*?

Most candidates gave details of the pasts referred to in the stories but were less successful at relating them to significant details in the characters' current situations. Others, such as the writer of Script J (a borderline Level 2/Level 3) was able to explain only very generally that the past has an influence on the characters and the events of the here and now, but relied too heavily on storytelling to establish this. Opportunities to contrast the values of the past with those of the present day were not taken up, nor was there any attempt to compare how the stories use the past differently (although this was not a specific requirement of the question).

Part II

Reassuringly, all candidates managed to ensure coverage of all four texts in answering both parts of the paper, and most of the questions in this part offered scope for any or all of the texts to be referred to. However, certain questions were notably popular and demonstrated a range of performance.

Question 14 required conventional character analyses:

14. Which are your **two** favourite *minor* characters? What attracts you to them? What do they add to the works they appear in?

This was mostly well answered, with characters such as Simon and Roger, Cassio and Emilia, Waddington and Colonel Yu discussed. The difficulties arose when candidates chose this question to cover the short stories text, as it is far more difficult to find *minor* characters in short stories. The writer of Script K, for example, writes reasonably about Emilia (though one or two quotations would have been helpful), but makes a grave misjudgement in choosing the blind man from *Cathedral*, who cannot by any stretch of the imagination be regarded as a minor character. Sadly, the writer's observations, however insightful they may be, could not be counted towards

the final mark, resulting in a probable Level 1 assessment for this essay.

It is the aim of Part II not only to offer the opportunity to compare texts, and to offer a range of questions that cover plot, theme, character, style, but also to invite candidates to be explicit about their responses to the texts in a more open-ended way. 13 provides a typical example of this kind of question:

13. Discuss some of the ways used to bring a work of literature to a satisfying close. Illustrate from **three** of your set texts.

Candidates who answered this question well understood that it could be most fully answered from the perspectives of plot and technique. The writer of Script L acknowledges this in the first paragraph. Three examples of closure are illustrated in an organized, if not particularly profound manner. This clarity places it slightly above average, though lack of quotation and the relative brevity of the essay may preclude it from the highest levels. Hence, it is likely to represent a borderline 3/4 level of performance.

Paper 2 (Set 2)

Unfortunately, no examples of Paper 2 Set 2 were included in the pilot study group, so no comments can be made on performance.

General Comments and Recommendations

All in all, candidates did not seem to encounter any significant problems in tackling the new papers, and performance on the Critical Analysis Section of Paper 1 showed a comprehensive understanding of the aims of this section.

Recommendations are therefore in line with previous CE level and AS/AL level Literature in English advice.

Candidates should:

- read the questions carefully to make sure they cover every facet in their answers
- define and summarize their response to the question briefly in their opening paragraphs

- familiarize themselves with appropriate technical terms employed in writing about poetry novels, drama and film (though the last of these need not be too sophisticated)
- provide quotations in support of points where necessary
- make sure they reiterate in their conclusions the main points they have made in answer to the question.