



**AQA Certificates
January 2013**

English Language

8705/1F

(Specification 8705)

**Paper 1: Literary Non Fiction and Composition
(Foundation)**

Report on the Examination

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Report on AQA Level 1/2 Certificate in English Language: Paper 1F 8705/1F January 2013

The examination paper encouraged some high quality responses, but even the weaker responses demonstrated some engagement with the text and the questions and were generally relevant. Almost all candidates managed to complete the tasks in the time allowed and most had divided their time appropriately between Section A and Section B, though some had rushed Section A and their overall mark suffered as a consequence, even though they had time to write several pages for Section B.

Section A

In Section A, candidates had to respond to five questions on an autobiographical text about an attack by a black bear. The subject matter seemed to have interested candidates and the fact that three of the questions were focused on short sections of texts was particularly helpful for less able candidates. Some candidates, though, would have been wise to note the number of marks for each question and divide their time accordingly. If there are six marks for a question, an answer which only covers two or three lines and contains only one point is clearly not going to gain many marks.

Question 1 was a simple retrieval question, and on this occasion candidates had to say what were the narrator's thoughts when she first saw the bear. Those who listed points in their answer were not penalised. There were three marks available, and three thoughts had to be identified. Those who just copied a quotation could only be awarded one mark for it, even if it contained two thoughts: candidates were expected to separate the two ideas, to show they knew there were two different thoughts within in the sentence. Candidates were awarded marks for appropriate quotations or appropriate interpretations. Most candidates actually scored a full 3 marks for the question.

Question 2 was more demanding, as candidates were expected to chart the development of the situation between the scientist and the bear between lines 6 and 18. Relying on just re-telling the story was not enough to be successful and simple narrative only achieved one or two marks. Better responses contained valid comments on how the bear and the scientist reacted, and why; and the best offered some analysis of the situation and the shift in power between the two which helped them reach the top band of 5-6 marks.

Question 3 asked candidates to focus on lines 19-32 and say why the narrator could not get help. The weakest responses contained mainly copied sentences, but many candidates were able to explain how she was unable to get hold of her radio, the problem being exacerbated by the buckle on her pack and the fact that she only had one arm that still worked and, anyway, how every time she moved the bear bit her again. Any three sensible points gained full marks.

Question 4 was more searching again and asked candidates to consider the whole passage and say how the narrator makes clear the power and savagery of the bear. It was not enough to just say what the bear did; to reach Band 2 or Band 3, answers had to offer ideas about the writer's techniques and focus on power and savagery, not just general aggression. There was no need to balance answers between power and savagery, but the best answers usually involved some discussion of the writer's use of language and on how the horror of the situation extends right through the passage. Examiners were looking for comments that were meaningful, and not just simple. Comments such as 'This quotation shows that the bear was powerful' were not valued highly. To achieve the top band and get 5 or 6 marks, candidates had to select quotations and say exactly how details had been used by the writer and the effect they had on the reader.

Question 5 asked candidates to refer to the whole passage – and they could not get top marks unless they did that – and say what they had learnt about the narrator's character. To move into the top band of 4-7 marks, responses had to not just state the narrator's characteristics, but also to explain them with close reference to the text. Any ideas which could be supported were acceptable, but most referred to and detailed her bravery, ability to withstand pain, quick-thinking, determination and so on. Answers which did not demonstrate empathy with her situation and reactions and said, incorrectly, that she was terrified throughout because anyone would be could gain little credit.

Section B

Candidates had the usual choice of writing a discursive essay, a description or a story. With all three questions, it was very obvious that in most cases a plan would almost certainly have improved the final product. It was pleasing to see almost all candidates writing in paragraphs, though it is disappointing that so few use paragraphs appropriately when writing speech. In actual fact, most speech marks were used accurately, but associated punctuation such as full-stops and commas rarely appeared.

Responses to Section B are marked on ideas and organisation, expression and technical accuracy. In preparing for the exam, it would be useful for candidates to be told what examiners are looking for. They want responses which respond to a question's precise demands; ideas in an effective structure and in effective paragraphs; expression which is clear and, where possible, original; and they want to see a range of punctuation used accurately, as well as accurate spelling. As ever, it seemed, many candidates would almost certainly have received higher marks if only they had taken the time to plan properly then check their responses, improving them appropriately.

Question 6

Many candidates chose to answer this question and write about whether humans are more important than animals. The majority disagreed with the proposition. The greatest weakness here was that so many responses were emotive but lacking in truly persuasive examples or evidence. Also, because they had not planned what they were going to say, many candidates began with a clear statement of their views but changed totally by the end of the piece.

Essays which gave priority to the harm humans cause to animals were often the most affecting, but others made wild claims which were incredible and less convincing.

Often, a simple format paid dividends for those who were not able to extend ideas far: an introduction dealing with the title; a section on humans and their values; a section on animals, and how they are treated; and a conclusion which arrived at a point of view. In many cases, though, ideas were jumbled and the accuracy of the writing seemed to suffer as candidates struggled with the concepts they wished to introduce.

Question 7 said: "‘They reached the top of the hill. What they saw filled them with terror.’ Describe what they saw." It was asking candidates to write to describe, so it was unfortunate that so many turned the task into narrative writing. Also, many wrote in the first person.

The descriptions often involved zombies eating human bodies, or giant evil creatures or extra-terrestrials desecrating the earth and its people. The writing owed much to scary movies but in some cases included vivid (and, often, quite revolting) detail. There were some original usages of similes and imagery generally; and speech was sometimes integrated effectively and powerfully. Where the ideas were also organised well, the results could be impressive.

Some candidates had the observers looking down on the bear from Section A and its torturing of Cynthia, and that was perfectly acceptable.

Question 8 asked candidates to write a story called ‘The Rescue.’

Amazingly, many hardly mentioned a rescue at all, which meant they lost credit for purpose when marks were being awarded. It was also surprising to find so many GCSE candidates starting stories with ‘Once upon a time’ but with no sense of irony; and, as with Question 7, so many finishing with ‘I woke up and it was all a dream.’ It does tend to suggest that large numbers of candidates have read very few stories since they were younger or/and had forgotten teaching that pointed them towards how to write an effective short story.

However, some of the responses were very powerful, and carried the reader to mountaintops or stormy seas; and others brought the examiner face to face with criminal gangs and family crises. Again, Cynthia and her torment cropped up regularly. The stories were frequently entertaining if sometimes incredible.

There is no doubt at all that huge numbers of candidates have wonderful imaginations. When those imaginations are controlled and supported by technical accuracy, it is a pleasure to award top marks.