

Examiners' Report Summer 2007

IGCSE

IGCSE English Language (4355)

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4355/1F

Section A: Reading

Q1 - Q6

The passage studied in Section A related the story of a polar explorer who was unexpectedly attacked by a leopard seal and narrowly rescued from certain death by his two companions. The passage proved to be accessible to most candidates, with very few experiencing any difficulties in reading comprehension. The lower mark tariff questions provided a useful lead into the passage and were generally done well. Q5 specifically asked candidates to address what went through the writer's mind before and after the second attack. Some candidates did not pick up full marks here because they did not address both parts of the question. The key discriminator, as in previous papers, was the focus on the writer's technique in Q6. Some candidates were able to explain how the writer makes the passage exciting for the reader and were able to draw on a range of techniques, as well as comparing and contrasting the two different attacks.

Section B: Reading and Writing

Q7

Section B was based upon the pre-prepared text from the Edexcel Anthology, *Chinese Cinderella*. Almost all candidates seemed to have knowledge of the text and were able to articulate their views upon the relationship of the writer with her father. Stronger responses were those that were able to focus upon the language used and how that is used to reveal a complex and at times, contradictory relationship. It is useful for candidates to consider that the bullet points are not free-standing items to be addressed independently, but are to be considered as a scaffold or structure that will enable them to better answer the question. Better answers did this whilst weaker responses only partially addressed the bullet points or narrated aspects of the writer's life. Candidates should also be advised that simply linking quotations from the passage, such as, "She entered "timidly" because she was in the "Holy of Holies"; although the candidate may have identified key quotations but this does not constitute a commentary without some further expansion.

Q8

The writing task in Section B asked candidates to imagine that they had been given the opportunity to live out a dream or ambition and then to, *describe what you would do and how you would feel*. This was accessible to all with weaker responses merely listing what they might buy or where they would travel to whilst better responses addressed the section part of the task and developed a sense of thought and feeling around the dream rather than focusing solely on the activity itself.

Section C: Writing

Q9

All candidates felt able to write about a day in their lives and, and this question produced some engaging responses. The better responses were those that demonstrated a clear sense of form and audience, both of which were clearly defined in the question. Weaker responses were often brief and tended to only respond to the first bullet point, listing things they would do rather than addressing the other aspects of people and likes and dislikes.

4355/2H

Section A: Reading

Q1 - Q4

The passage studied in Section A was an account of landing briefly and somewhat perilously at the North Pole. The passage proved to be accessible to most candidates, with very few experiencing any difficulties in reading comprehension. Q1 and Q2 provided a useful lead into the passage and were done well by almost all candidates. The focus on humour in question proved to be elusive for some candidates. Whilst there were some more obvious examples of self-deprecating humour and irony, which most candidates chose, those who did not “tune in” to the writer’s voice found this a difficult task. The key discriminator is the higher mark tariff Q4 and its focus on the writer’s technique. Weaker responses were only able to recognise some of the more literal elements of danger and remoteness, such as “a lethal landscape”, whilst some candidates were able to explain how the uses such techniques as comparison and variety in sentence length and structure or the sinister personification of the engines eating away at the precious fuel supply.

Section B: Reading and Writing

Q5

Section B was based upon the pre-prepared text from the Edexcel Anthology, *Touching the Void*. Almost all candidates seemed to have knowledge of the text and were able to articulate their views upon Simon and how the writer presents his experiences. Stronger responses were those that were able to focus upon the language used to articulate a complex range of emotions. Better answers made perceptive points about the writer’s technique and showed a sound analysis of language whilst weaker responses narrated aspects of the passage or mixed up the two climbers and so wrote about Joe rather than Simon.

Q6

The writing task in Section B asked candidates to imagine that they had witnessed an accident or exciting rescue and to, *write a report for your local newspaper describing what you saw*. This was accessible to all candidates with weaker responses often presenting an incomplete or basic depiction of some aspects of an accident. With weaker responses there was a tendency to assume an understanding in the reader that had not been effectively created or communicated by the writer. Better responses demonstrated a mastery of the form with such techniques as parenthetical insertions used to give thumbnail character sketches, and generally used language in a powerful and skilfully controlled manner to engage the reader throughout.

Section C: Writing

Q7

All candidates felt able to write about a place that evokes strong feelings for them. The choice of place was not important, though there were many childhood memories and places that reminded the writer of people who were no longer part of their lives. Weaker responses were often brief and tended to be limited in their ability to communicate a sense of place, often producing a simple chronological narrative. They tended not to recognise the needs of the reader and, as in Q6, assumed some understanding of people or place that the reader could not have shared. More able

responses were those that demonstrated a clear sense of form and audience and were able to evoke a sense of place whilst also developing a keen understanding of the writer's emotional attachment to it.

4355/03

The entry increased significantly this year. Also, this was the first year that scripts were scanned and marked on line, a procedure which allows for much tighter control of assessment.

Overall the paper worked well. All questions were accessible and overall there was a sense of a candidature which is increasingly at ease with the requirements of the specification. The most notable indication of this growing confidence was the amount candidates wrote in answer to the questions. Most responses were comprehensively developed. Some candidates, however, confused quality with quantity; a long answer is not necessarily a good answer. Relevance remains a key factor in the reading question, and precision of expression is often the hallmark of the best writing in Q2.

Though not an assessable feature of scripts, the presentation of answers was generally good, and most handwriting was clearly legible.

Q1: Reading

Most candidates had clearly been taught this text with considerable thoroughness and most answers were detailed and comprehensive. Unlike previous years there were very few answers from candidates who seemed to be reading the passage for the first time in the examination room. The question required candidates to write about the ways in which the writer built up "feelings of fear and uncertainty"; some candidates tended, however, to write about how the passage engaged the reader's sympathy, a related issue, but by no means the same. This meant that answers, though very long, only attained modest marks. Few candidates were also inclined to reproduce notes either directly from the student's guide or those given by their teachers, without relating them to the question actually set. Some responses had the form of a series of generic notes, sometimes under headings, about linguistic techniques; these were relevant to the passage but not to the question. Some candidates also commented on the italicised introduction which was included by the editors of the Anthology to contextualise this passage; this should not be regarded as part of the passage (neither should the title). Another form of irrelevance was to treat the bullet points as separate sub-questions, rather than as indicators of the focus needed to address the central issues of the leading question.

Most candidates, however, showed a sound grasp of how the writer built up suspense and fear, and each bullet point was addressed, often at length. Comments related to the first bullet point were almost universally relevant. Weaker answers faltered over Andre, some even suggesting that he was the younger of the two brothers. Stronger answers traced the way that his childish lack of concern at the beginning ("uncaring") developed in the course of the passage into growing knowledge and awareness, a movement towards a kind of certainty. At a modest level of attainment, candidates' comments on other characters referred to the orderly who "came with postcards on which to write a final message." Stronger answers were sometimes defined by sensitive discussion of the woman who stared at her child (some misinterpreted this as Andre) "with a terrible ferocity." The most successful answers, however, were those which dealt with the use of language in some depth, and analysed how tension and a sense of terror are built through individual words and phrases. In weaker answers, comments on language tended to be generalised, amounting sometimes to little more than identifying figures of speech.

There was a distinct improvement in the quality of textual reference. Many candidates tried to use brief illustrative quotations, integrated into a comment which

addressed the question. Less successful responses still tended to rely on very long quotations to support points.

Q2: Writing

The questions were accessible to all candidates, and almost equally popular, though Q2(c) was marginally more favoured. In general the standard of answers was good. As last year, there were occasional problems with Standard English, some use of texting forms, and American spelling, but the vast majority of answers were soundly expressed. The standard of technical and grammatical accuracy was generally pleasing. The most worrying error in this respect was the use of commas to demarcate sentences; this may seriously impede clear communication.

Q2(a)

This produced, perhaps unsurprisingly, some detailed and lengthily developed advice, much of which was no doubt fresh in students' minds from the talks their teachers had given them prior to the examination period. Overall the quality of the advice was excellent, though it would have required a paragon amongst candidates to have followed all of it. A key discriminator was the extent to which the candidate showed a grasp of purpose. The best answers showed a strong awareness of the given context and audience - a talk to fellow students. Many answers worked as essays, but would have been very tedious to listen to. More successful candidates adopted an appropriately informal style and sometimes used humour and rhetoric to engage the interest and attention of their peers.

Q2(b)

This produced some very lively, thoughtful and occasionally passionate answers, both in favour of corporal punishment and against. The majority of candidates showed a capacity to develop a logical argument, using anecdotal and other evidence to support ideas. Those in favour of corporal punishment argued that it was justified in some circumstances, particularly where a child needed to be taught (perhaps for their own safety) a short sharp lesson, and argued that without discipline, a heavy price would be paid later in terms of crime; those against argued that such violence only bred more violence.

Q2(c)

Responses to this question were generally weaker. The use of the word "exploring" in the wording of the question was a strong indication that the emphasis was on this triplet verb rather than "entertain". The most successful answers recognised this; candidates often wrote about a convincingly personal experience, in the process of which they conveyed their thoughts and feelings in some detail and concluded with a clear and often developed comment on the lessons they had derived from the experience. Less successful answers concentrated on recounting the events rather than the impact they had on the candidate. The weakest answers of all tended to be those which merely adapted a prepared story (usually about kidnapping or abduction) and tagged on a hackneyed moral. The more candidates write from actual experience, the more likely they are to write well.

4355/04 (Coursework)

There is little to report that is radically different from last year. A pattern of consistency has been established and the overall performance of candidates in May 2007 was comparable and very similar to previous years.

The coursework folders were, in most instances, a pleasure to moderate. They were, almost without exception, thorough, carefully presented and well focused on the specification requirements and assessment objectives. As such they were a credit to both candidates and teachers.

Centre assessment was sound, if inclined to the generous, but within generally acceptable margins, and rank orders posed few problems. There was consequently little need to adjust centre marks. The marking grids for both the reading and written units were used effectively. Where problems arose it was usually with individual rogue folders, which were blatantly and incomprehensibly over rewarded for slipshod, sketchy work.

The quality of teacher annotation also remains high, and, increasingly, reference is made to the grid descriptors to justify the mark awarded. It was also encouraging to see evidence of internal moderation in the written comments on folders.

Task setting was also very sound and varied in most instances, following the assessment objectives closely. Appropriately challenging work was set to allow able candidates to access the higher mark bands.

The overall standard of administration was excellent. Most centres followed the procedures assiduously and sometimes to excess; it is, for instance, unnecessary to send more folders than those indicated, unless, of course, the centre's top and bottom folders are not included in the requested sample. Centres are reminded that Candidate Authentication Sheets must be sent for each candidate in the sample.

There were some exceptions to the generally high standard of administrative and academic efficiency, including one serious breach of the specification requirements, and occasional failures to address the assessment objectives. Some folders also bore no evidence of teacher annotation and, in some instances, the marks on the frontsheets did not make sense or tally.

Plagiarism remains an issue, but not a problem. Most centres are aware of the need for constant vigilance and rigorous supervision. One of the ways of ensuring the integrity of student work is by tailoring tasks to individual groups and students. The kind of generic essays which are available on some websites will then not be of any use.

Unit 1: Reading Unit - Response to Section B of the Anthology

Apart from one centre that submitted work based on Section A of the Anthology, there were few problems. It is important that tasks should encourage an analytical approach to allow candidates to access the reading grids, and most did. It was pleasing to note that some centres, with large numbers of able students, used individualised and demanding comparative tasks, which allowed their candidates to fulfil higher band descriptors.

Unit 2: Writing Unit - Personal and Imaginative Writing

Many titles invited strong personal responses from students; autobiographical and narrative writing predominated. Occasionally tasks did not address one of the specified triplet verbs; for instance, a task which requires analysis of song lyrics is essentially a reading not a writing task. Some centres submitted two or more units for this unit, an approach which is more likely to depress the mark than enhance it. In most instances the writing grids were used precisely, but occasionally it was difficult to see how the centre had arrived at the mark awarded. In particular high marks were sometimes awarded in the second grid for no apparent reason, in one instance for writing that was full of errors, including the use of the texting forms 'u' and 'im.'

Statistics for IGCSE English Language 4355

Option 1: 1F, 03

Grade	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Boundary Mark				53	41	29	18	7

Option 2: 1F, 04, 05

Grade	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Boundary Mark				54	42	30	18	6

Option 3: 2H, 03

Grade	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Boundary Mark	72	63	54	46	34	28		

Option 4: 2H, 04, 05

Grade	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Boundary Mark	76	66	56	47	36	30		

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