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Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2019

Pearson Edexcel International GCSE
In English Language (4EA0) Paper 01

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Publications Code 4EAO_01_1901_ER

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Introduction

The paper is organised into three sections. Section A tests only reading and is based upon an unseen passage. The passage studied in Section A in January 2019 was adapted from *Star of the Morning: The Extraordinary Life of Lady Hester* by Kirsten Ellis and told of the final days of Lady Hester Stanhope, an upper-class British lady who lived her final years as an eccentric recluse in the Middle East. Section B tests both reading and writing by asking candidates to respond to one of the non-fiction passages from the Anthology, in this case, *Touching the Void*. Section C is a single writing task that is not connected to either of the reading activities already undertaken on the paper. The paper was well received with most candidates finding it very accessible. This was the final examination in this legacy version of the International GCSE.

Section A: Reading

Questions 1-4

The passage chosen proved to be accessible to almost all candidates, with very few experiencing any difficulties in reading comprehension. Question 1 is intended to be a gentle way into the paper and tests the skills of selection and retrieval, asking candidates to identify the name of the British queen at the time of Lady Hester Stanhope's death. There was only a single mark for this question and almost all candidates were able to determine that it was Queen Victoria. Question 2 asked candidates to select three words or phrases that described the hillside where Lady Hester Stanhope lived. The mark scheme identifies eleven possible responses and many candidates gained full marks but those who did not often did not choose words or phrases from the selected lines or did not directly answer the question. Question 3 asked candidates to explain what we learn about the British Ambassador, Niven Moore. As a four-mark question there were many possible responses to this question. Many achieved full or nearly full marks and were able to explain about his role as an investigator; many recognised that it was unusual for the Ambassador to come so far in order to deal with things personally and that this showed his determination and his bravery, as he made his way up to the house in the dark disregarding the dangers of wild animals. Where candidates did not score full marks some failed to give sufficient detail for full marks and others listed features without offering any explanation. It is possible to score full marks on this question without finding four distinct points, as the quality of explanation is a key part of the response. Centres should know that the mark scheme explicitly instructs markers to reward the quality of explanation rather than simply counting the number of features that have been identified and they should bear this in mind when preparing candidates for this type of question. Question 4 was the higher mark tariff question in Section A with its greater focus on the writer's technique. This asked candidates about how the writer tries to create interest in the passage and provided bullet points for additional support and structure. All markers were made aware of a range of possible interpretations and that they should credit any that were clearly founded in the text. In the published mark scheme examiners are

told that they, "must reward all valid points that show an engagement with the text and an appreciation of the writer's technique rather than have a set agenda of items that they are looking for." Weaker responses were often limited to a small number of points focusing on particular elements within the passage, such as Lady Hester's relationship with her servants, though often providing little or no development. Many candidates were able to provide a more detailed understanding of how the writer unfolds the story from description of Lady Hester's death, through the flashback to her younger self and ends with the arrival of the British Ambassador and his assessment of her life. Better answers showed a perceptive and well-developed response to the text with extended comments about the use of imagery and the creation of pathos. Some answers showed a subtle and perceptive understanding as they recognised the manner in which the structure allows the reader to understand the vibrant and attractive Lady Hester in her early years and how this contrasts with the solitary, elderly figure living by candlelight and stroking her horses in the starlight night. Many commented on the powerful imagery used throughout the passage, such as the 'skull-cropped grey hair' which contrasts with her 'long dark chestnut hair like an aureole'. Weaker answers were often able to select a number of word-level features, such as the heat of the hillside, the 'heat-distorted haze' or the presentation of her simple surroundings with her 'coarse blankets' and her 'low-slung bed' but were not able to comment on other features, such as the symbolism of the light that 'glittered and danced about her then.' Essentially the most successful candidates demonstrated higher skills of analysis and interpretation in evaluating the writer's techniques and did so by directly and doggedly focusing on the question. As has been said before in these reports, linked text and paraphrase does not constitute an explanation. It was a feature of better answers that they were more able to recognise the change in emotions felt by the writer and created for the reader throughout the passage. They appreciated the shaping of the passage as a whole and saw how the passage has a deliberate structure allowing the reader to gain more than one view of the life and death of Lady Hester.

Section B: Reading and Writing

Question 5

Section B was based upon the pre-prepared text from the Edexcel Anthology for International GCSE English Language and Literature, *Touching the Void*, and told the story of mountain climbers, Joe and Simon, and the different ways they respond to Joe's accident. As a prepared text almost all candidates seemed to have knowledge of this text. Many candidates were able to comment on the basic difference between Joe's description of the pain of the pain of the accident and his emotive response compared to Simon's more dispassionate and calculating response to the situation. Many candidates commented upon the use of powerful and emotive language, such as "My knee exploded" and the repetition of simple words such as 'screamed.' Weaker answers often described what had happened. Stronger responses were those that

focused on the different first-person narratives and the range of techniques being used which gives the reader an insight into the reaction of the respective writer.

Question 6

The writing task in Section B was closely related to the reading text in section B and asked candidates to write about a time in their lives when they helped someone to do something that was difficult. The title was accessible to almost all candidates and produced a wide range of responses. Many wrote about helping friends to overcome personal struggles whilst many others wrote about overcoming physical challenges, such as sporting activities. Weaker responses tended to neglect the needs of the reader, not making things clear to the reader and making little use of any language techniques. Other weak responses were often incomplete, lacking in paragraphing or structure and communicating at a basic level. Better responses wrote with a skilful command of the language showing a strong ability to engage the reader, creating character and situation. The importance of planning was evident in those better responses which had a clear sense of structure and textual cohesion.

Section C: Writing

Question 7

Candidates were asked to write their entry for a competition focused upon the title: 'Time to Make a Change in My Life!' This proved to be accessible to most candidates. Centres should note that the writing responses and particularly the final, 20 mark question, are sometimes not answered at all by some candidates. It is vital that students time their responses carefully and take note of the mark tariff, giving section C one third of the time available to them. This question produced a variety of responses. Many candidates focused upon the need to improve the quality of their school-work or their attitude to their studies.

Weaker responses were often very brief and were limited in their ability to clearly express their ideas. These answers were often lacking in paragraphing and a sense of structure, which kept them in the Level 1 and Level 2 mark bands. Mid-level responses often used a reasonable vocabulary and a developing sense of text control though sometimes lacking in range and making use of slang in what was otherwise a formal piece of writing. More able responses wrote with imagination and flair and avoid the inevitable clichés inherent in a title such as this. The best writing showed subtlety and maturity and a control of a wide range of techniques to produce writing that connected strongly with its reader. They were often able to express complex ideas with clarity in a manner that connected strongly with the intended reader.

Conclusion

Each section above contains specific advice about what characterises weaker and stronger candidates. Centres are strongly encouraged to

practise responding to unseen passages in timed conditions. This will support students in focusing their answers on what the question has asked for and in using their understanding of literary effects as a means of addressing the question rather than being seen as an end in their own right. The same principle applies with regard to studying the Anthology texts. The best practice in writing involves time management so as to respond appropriately to the mark tariff and the time available. Candidates need to focus on developing textual cohesion through effective planning, paragraphing and structuring their writing. At all times have the intended reader in mind and make word level, sentence level and text level choices with a clear understanding of the intended effect. Writing should be seen as a crafted artefact and students should be taught the skills of writing with this in mind whatever the task may be.