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Introduction

This is the second series of the new specification and centres and candidates on the whole seem to have adapted well to the different Assessment Objectives and mark distributions on the paper. Examiners commented that there was evidence of some good teaching and learning in preparation for this examination in the responses seen and examiners commented that many candidates seemed to be learning how to respond to the tasks and were well prepared overall.

Examiners commented that the texts about reading were accessible across the full range of abilities and generally candidates were able to engage with the texts and tasks and respond appropriately.

Better candidates were able to engage fully with both texts and respond thoughtfully and articulately. Their writing responses were often engaging and effective and were well controlled and accurate. Weaker candidates sometimes struggled to understand the passages and the questions. Their writing was often pedestrian or lacked coherence and had weak language controls.

There were candidates who copied out all, or considerable chunks, of the extracts in response to Question 8. This can never be a successful way to respond as the candidate is required to produce their own work and show the ability to adapt the original texts for a different audience and purpose.

Section A (Questions 1-7)

This consists of two short retrieval questions and a question on the writer's use of language and structure to create effects on each text and a question requiring candidates to compare the two texts.

Question 1

Question on Text One which does not require candidates to use their own words.

Most candidates responded to this question successfully. The most popular responses to identify one way the writer was biased were 'he is an author' or 'he is a reader'. Occasional incorrect responses mentioned 'obviously and enormously' or 'I am biased' which did not identify a way he is biased. Candidates must ensure they read the text and the question carefully.

Question 2

Question on Text One which does not require candidates to use their own words.

Most candidates responded to this question successfully. The most popular responses were 'gives everyone an equal chance in life', 'helps people become confident readers' and 'helps people become enthusiastic readers'. Occasionally candidates used references to other parts of the extract. Candidates must ensure they read the question carefully.

Question 3

The question asks the candidate how the writer presents his ideas.

Responses to this question were on the whole encouraging. Examiners commented that most candidates demonstrated at least some understanding of the text and awareness of the devices used to present ideas.

Successful candidates explored the range of language techniques used by Neil Gaiman, paying detailed attention to the effects achieved. Successful candidates analysed Gaiman's use of language such as listing, direct address, the use of Einstein's quotation and explained how they were persuasive.

Examiners commented that many candidates were able to identify language and structure features, supporting them with relevant quotations from the text and offering some explanation of how these features helped the writer to achieve his effects.

There was also evidence of 'feature spotting' where candidates identify (correctly) particular language features but do not explain them.

Less successful candidates produced responses that were content-based without much focus on 'how the writer presents his ideas'. These responses often described what Gaiman said rather than commenting on his techniques. Some examiners commented that they saw a number of these types of responses. Some of the weakest responses were simply summaries of the text.

Centres need to remind candidates that this AO2 focused question asks how the writer achieves effects.

Question 4

Question on Text Two which does not require candidates to use their own words.

Most candidates answered correctly with 'sports', 'computer games' and 'friendships'. Occasionally candidates used material from outside the line references. Candidates need to make sure they have read the question carefully.

Question 5

Question on Text Two which does not require candidates to use their own words.

The most popular responses were 'school/homework', 'screens/smart phones', 'family' and 'friends/relationships'. Some candidates used the same bullet point twice e.g. 'friends/relationships' and 'hanging out'. Candidates need to make sure they have read the question carefully.

Question 6

The question asks the candidate how the writer describes teenagers' attitudes towards reading. Some examiners commented that candidates coped slightly better with this question than they did on Question 3, however other examiners observed that candidates did not do as well on this question.

Most candidates were able to identify and explain some of the ways the writer describes teenage attitudes towards reading and the language used to express this although there was often a tendency to explain what the language meant rather than how it was used for effect.

In successful responses candidates analysed the simile 'like monks or druids' together with exploring the use of positive and negative language, the use of organisations and the first-person pronoun.

Less successful responses were often content-based and explained or summarised the writer's point of view or arguments, sometimes supported with evidence, but not exploring the impact of the language on the reader.

There was also evidence of 'feature spotting' where candidates identify (correctly) particular language features but do not explain them. Weaker candidates tended to re-tell the events.

As with question 3, centres need to remind candidates that this AO2 focused question asks how the writer achieves effects not what he says.

Question 7

This question requires candidates to compare how the writers convey their ideas and perspectives. Examiners commented that the majority of candidates were able to identify and discuss basic differences at a minimum, and some produced some well-thought out comparisons of the extracts, however some examiners observed that there were a number of responses which did not compare the texts.

Most candidates did make comparisons between the texts and write about both. Some examiners commented that most candidates were able to select obvious points and compare these with some supporting textual references. Better responses focused on comparison throughout and were able to make a significant number of points. Some candidates were more sophisticated and did provide a range of comparisons. They identified the pessimistic attitude of Text Two and realised that both texts were persuasive in different ways. Some candidates were able to provide apt references and link them to their points. Overall candidates tended to focus less on language and more on viewpoint and ideas.

Some less successful candidates wrote about each text separately with a very brief comparison at the end. Weaker candidates often compared the content. They sometimes focused on exploring one text in some detail and then simply added some undeveloped points about the other text afterwards. The least successful candidates wrote very little or wrote about one text and then wrote about the other text, with no comparison at all. A small number of candidates responded as if this question was the Question 10 from the legacy specification which meant that they were not addressing the task.

Centres will need to continue to work with candidates to make sure they have a clear understanding of valid ways of responding to texts. This should include how to analyse how writers use language and structure to achieve their effects and how to write comparative responses.

Section B (Question 8)

There was some evidence of good teaching and learning in the responses to this section. There was some evidence of planning which was pleasing. The most useful plans were relatively short but allowed candidates to focus and organise their ideas effectively. Plans should be in the answer booklet rather than on an additional sheet. Some examiners commented that candidates who planned their responses seemed to respond in a more focused manner.

There were a good number of lively, well written responses to this task. Most candidates understood the requirement of the task and were able to use the appropriate register for a talk to peers. It was generally felt candidates engaged with this task and some produced lively and convincing responses. The most successful responses had a strong sense of audience and purpose and included rhetorical language and humour to engage their audience. Many candidates were able to adopt an appropriate register and there was clear evidence of an

understanding of the purpose, audience and format required although some examiners commented that a number of candidates struggled to adopt or maintain an appropriate register.

AO1

Most candidates referred to the three bullet points and managed to cover a reasonable number of points. However, although relevant points were selected, they were not always developed and interpreted effectively enough. The final bullet point ('advice to help people read more') was occasionally covered in much less detail or depth.

The common reasons given for not reading were: addiction to technology, teenage distractions, school; those given for the importance of reading were: it helps with communication, can lead to academic success, the need at times to leave technology behind and lose yourself in a different reality that is reading for pleasure. They also wanted to promote the importance of reading for information. The role of libraries and librarians also featured prominently in advice given to help people read more as well as the increasing availability of ebooks.

Weaker candidates simply retold the texts. In weaker responses there was also evidence of lifting from the original texts.

AO4

Examiners commented that most candidates were able to produce a successful talk about reading using form, tone and register appropriately and effectively. There was clear evidence of an understanding of the purpose, audience and format required in many of the responses.

Most candidates produced a convincing talk. These often sounded like the spoken voice. The tone was apt and often sympathetic and supportive. They sometimes included humour and they related well to their intended audience.

Better candidates produced lively and engaging responses fully focused on their intended audience. These responses were full of practical comments, anecdotes and an empathetic tone. They included rhetorical devices, short sentences, a personal voice and impressive use of hyperbole and ellipsis.

Many candidates used quotations to support their rhetoric with a range of interesting (and sometimes inaccurate) sources.

Some candidates only acknowledged the register at the beginning and ending of their response, rather than maintaining it through the whole response. Weaker candidates had problems sustaining the required register throughout their response.

AO5

There were examples of successful responses with high levels of accuracy. These candidates were adept at using a wide range of punctuation marks and sentence types in order to draw attention to particular information or to clarify and direct the reader.

Most responses were structured and organised reasonably effectively, although only the more able could use structural and grammatical features effectively and deliberately. There was some evidence of candidates attempting to use ambitious vocabulary inappropriately. Spelling and punctuation were often correct and many candidates tried hard to use a range of sentence structures and punctuation for effect.

Some examiners commented that some candidates had problems with grammar, despite good spelling and punctuation.

Centres should continue to work to ensure candidates have a clear idea of how to adapt ideas from texts and how to write appropriately for different audiences and purposes.

Section C (Question 9, 10 and 11)

Question 10 was the most popular question.

There was evidence of some good preparation and teaching in this section. There was evidence of planning which is to be encouraged. However the use of very long plans or draft essays is to be discouraged as they are not a good use of time. Candidates should be encouraged to plan their response in the answer booklet rather than on separate additional sheets. Examiners commented on how much they enjoyed reading the responses in this section.

Question 9

AO4

Many examiners commented positively on candidates' responses to this question. However some examiners thought that some candidates struggled to develop and sustain a response which suggests this was not a wise choice of question.

Almost all candidates who attempted it were able to make a range of points about living life rather than reading about it with some success.

There were some strongly argued and engaging responses with competent writing and some well-developed and well-expressed ideas.

The majority of candidates were clear about the discursive approach required by this question. There was a good range of rhetoric present in the discussions and the deliberate inclusion of techniques, such as questioning, listing and personal pronouns.

A number of candidates explored the fact that reading and the imagination can be more powerful than the reality of doing something for yourself. In other words you can enjoy 'seeing' a tourist attraction for example through the eyes of someone else and do not have to endure the negative aspects of that experience (wasted time, expense, boredom of flight and travel delays etc). It can be an efficient way of 'educating' yourself and opening up new horizons without the pain. There were, of course, candidates who wanted extreme experiences and felt that reading about someone else doing something was tedious - you only really embraced jumping out of a plane, for example, by actually doing it yourself and feeling that unique experience. Weaker candidates offered points that were quite predictable and found it difficult to sustain an argument, often leading to repetition.

Centres need to ensure that candidates who choose this option are well prepared in argumentative, discursive and rhetorical techniques and are able to develop their ideas effectively.

Question 10

AO4

Examiners commented positively on the quality of some of the responses to the title 'Friendship'.

There were many varied interpretations on the title. One examiner commented that the stories were often uplifting and sometimes very sad.

Some of the narrative stories were full of pace and conflict and they were often fast moving but sometimes they involved too much direct speech and the plot stumbled rather than being properly executed. Sometimes it felt as if these responses were not stories at all but genuine personal anecdotes or experiences often successfully recounted. However one examiner commented that focusing on recounting real-life, factual events which meant some candidates failed to show the range and variety of ideas and approaches required to access the higher levels.

Some narratives were a little unrealistic in terms of how quickly lives turned around because of a friendship.

Some candidates tried to cover rather ambitious time spans in their narrative – one examiner commented on a time span of 35 years. Some examiners commented that candidates had a semi-prepared story that they were determined to adapt for whichever title they were given using some tenuously linked opening or concluding paragraphs about friendship, which often made it a disjointed story.

Weaker candidates struggled at times with clarity, with muddled storylines and weak endings that were not closely related to the events that had unfolded. Centres need to ensure candidates have a secure understanding of narrative techniques and the ability to develop a coherent personal response.

Question 11

AO4

Candidates produced some well written responses that were fully focused on the task of describing an experience that had made a positive difference. Better responses were detailed and lively with fully developed ideas. There was some excellent description with close attention to detail throughout.

The successful responses were able to detail how it had been a positive experience, exploring the change in their thinking and showing the consequences of that experience. These individuals had matured; they had re-assessed their attitudes or behaviour and they often saw life from a different perspective. These responses often focused on small incidents but they nevertheless had significant positive effects on the recipient. This included a conversation with someone who provided advice; watching the behaviour and actions of someone else and learning from that experience; attending a function and realising that an activity you had witnessed would be of interest to you. Most responses were clearly and competently written, using some range of descriptive techniques and varied vocabulary although some were rather predictable.

One examiner commented that it was uplifting to read the majority of these responses. Weaker responses tended to be linear narratives that were often repetitive in structure and lacking variety.

Centres need to ensure candidates are aware of the techniques they can use in descriptive writing and also ensure candidates develop a varied vocabulary which they can use appropriately.

AO5 Comments across Questions 9, 10 and 11

There was evidence of good spelling and reasonably accurate punctuation, but most examiners commented on candidates who had problems with grammar and expression. Some of this was unidiomatic English but there were also problems with tenses and sentence structure including missing words. These problems limited the effectiveness of the communication.

Whilst the majority of candidates were able to construct texts with grammar and punctuation which was mostly accurate, less able candidates used very little variety to create effects or emphasis. Examiners commented that sometimes sentence structure was a weakness. There was some inappropriate use of advanced vocabulary. Better responses had full control of spelling, punctuation and grammar. Weaker candidates had poor language controls with problems with grammatical structures as well as inconsistent spelling, punctuation and weak paragraphing.

Centres need to focus on developing accurate and effective grammatical structuring and idiomatic English to enable candidates to express themselves clearly and access the higher mark bands.

Summary

Most successful candidates:

- read the texts with insight and engagement
- were able to explore language and structure and show how these are used by writers to achieve effects (Questions 3 and 6)
- were able to select a wide range of comparisons and explore the writers' ideas and perspectives (Question 7)
- were able to select and adapt relevant information for Question 8
- wrote clearly with a good sense of audience and purpose in an appropriate register in response to Question 8
- engaged the reader with creative writing that was clearly expressed, well developed and controlled (Questions 9, 10 and 11)
- used ambitious vocabulary
- wrote with accuracy in spelling, punctuation and grammar.

Least successful candidates:

- did not engage fully with the texts
- were not able to identify language and structure or made little comment on how these are used by writers to achieve effects (Questions 3 and 6)
- were not able to compare the texts or offered very limited comparisons (Question 7)
- sometimes narrated the texts in response to Questions 3, 6 and 7
- did not write in an appropriate register in response to Question 8
- were not able to select and adapt relevant information for Question 8
- sometimes copied from the original texts in response to Question 8
- were not able to sustain and develop ideas clearly in response to Section C (Question 9, 10 and 11)
- did not demonstrate accuracy in spelling, punctuation and grammar.