

Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2016

Pearson Edexcel International GCSE
in English Literature (4ET0)
Paper 01

Edexcel Certificate
in English Literature (KET0)
Paper 01

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General Comments

The full ability range was seen this series with the most popular texts once again being: 'Of Mice and Men', 'An Inspector Calls', 'Romeo and Juliet' and 'A View from the Bridge'. 'To Kill a Mockingbird' and 'Pride and Prejudice' remain as choices for a number of centres. The majority of candidates demonstrated a good understanding of the themes and characters in texts used. Sometimes, points used were inappropriately selected or overtly narrative; this led to degrees of irrelevance in answers. As in the last January series, use of quotation was seen being widely used by candidates. When selected and used with strategy, this support enabled candidates to consolidate arguments and explore aspects of a writer's craft more effectively. Too often, quotation was applied with only tenuous relevance to the point being made which detracted from achievement at Levels 2 and 3. There was evidence that a number of candidates tried to reproduce revised or previously practised questions with little consideration of the question asked. This had the effect of limiting achievement. Level 1 and Level 2 answers were often restricted by lack of development or clarity, while Level 3 answers were characterised by a more structured approach to the question that enabled candidates to build deeper and more secure arguments.

Answers attracting marks at Level 4 reflected a thorough and thoughtful approach to the text and question. Developing analysis and relevant, consistently applied support were often instrumental in lifting strong Level 3 responses into Level 4.

Level 5 responses seen offered deep and impressive knowledge of texts and there was evidence of imaginative approaches to analysis with some candidates feeling confident enough to express sometimes unconventional, but valid views. The structure of many of these answers allowed candidates to present perceptive and focused arguments.

Careful reading of questions is a vital exam skill and it was unfortunate that some candidates misread question 2a on Mrs Birling and her relationships with other characters in the play. This misreading led to some answers on Mr Birling instead. It was agreed amongst the senior examining team that where candidates answered on Mr Birling's relationship with other characters candidates would be restricted on indicative content – except when referencing Mr Birling's relationship with Mrs Birling - but would still be able to achieve some marks by applying the mark scheme levels.

The examining team works hard to ensure that exam questions are as clear and accessible as possible for candidates to follow, but inevitably with English Literature there are characters whose names are similar in some way. It is essential that candidates are encouraged to read the question thoroughly, more than once, to ensure that they understand what is being asked.

Questions 1a and 1b

Question: How does Miller present the character of Beatrice in this play?

Examiners reported a largely positive response to this question with a full range of marks seen. Most candidates knew this character well and there was evidence that they had studied and revised thoroughly in many cases. Personal engagement was often present in the form of sympathy with Beatrice's role and situation. The best answers considered her in impressive detail, discussing her relationship with Eddie and considering Miller's intentions in his portrayal of her within the play's wider context. Strong answers selected textual reference with skill while weaker responses struggled to integrate quotation and support.

Question: Explore the theme of honour in this play.

This question was less popular than 1a. Focus on the theme was consistent but quality of responses varied considerably. Less effective answers stuck to the Sicilian code of honour (which most seemed to understand quite well) but did not always link this to specific details from the play. The best answers defined their understanding of the different kinds of honour such as family honour, community honour etc. Some better answers related their arguments to the concepts of hubris and Greek Tragedy with pleasing results. Some understanding of context was well integrated into a number of responses.

Questions 2a and 2b

Question: How does Priestley present Mrs Birling's relationships with other characters in this play?

This was an extremely popular question. Some answers took a methodical approach to the question, outlining Mrs Birling's character and then dealing with one relationship per paragraph to form the essay. This format resulted largely in Level 2 and 3 quality work. Many very pleasing answers were seen with focus on context linked to Mrs Birling's attitudes to others and the nature of change in many of her relationships e.g. with Sheila and Eric. Weaker answers relied on narrative and often lacked development. Some answers at Levels 4 and 5 used references to language, structure and style to focus on the 'present' element of the question with many relating this to Priestley's socialist agenda. The quotation: 'girls of that class' featured in many answers. Good points made included Mrs Birling's interaction with the Inspector, her role with the charity and the imbalance in her relationship with Mr Birling, coming as she did from a higher social class than him. Some skimmed over her relationship with Sheila, while stronger answers demonstrated some focused insight.

Unfortunately, a number of candidates misread the question and wrote whole essays on Mr Birling's relationships with other characters. As in the answers focused correctly on Mrs Birling, all levels of achievement were seen. The best of these answers ranged through the play, making supported and apposite points, albeit on the wrong character. Please see reference to this in the general comments section.

Question: 'After Inspector Goole has left, the play becomes even more dramatic.' How far do you agree with this view of the ending of this play?

This answer was less popular than 2a, but still attracted a large number of answers. Weaker responses clung to narrative, essentially retelling the story after the Inspector leaves. The better examples of these were more secure in their knowledge of the play's events and there was some variation in the extent of this. Some approached the dramatic nature of the Inspector's arrival with his departure with some success. Some candidates struggled to focus on the evaluative nature of the question while better answers related the events to Priestley's intentions and dramatic techniques. The best answers deftly used references to dramatic irony, stage directions and structure to build convincing and relevant answers.

Questions 3a and 3b

Question: How does Shakespeare present common soldiers in this play?

A very small number of candidates answered on this question. A few wrote about soldiering in general while others struggled to decide who the soldiers are in the play. Some better answers considered Shakespeare's presentation of relevant characters such as Bardolph, Nym, Pistol and Williams.

Question: How important are the events after the Battle of Agincourt to this play's themes?

This question was less popular than 3a. Only one or two answers were seen. Better responses dealt with events such as Henry's courtship of Katherine and the political implications of this.

Questions 4a and 4b

Question: Who, in your opinion, is the most courageous character in this play and why?

A small number of answers were seen but weaker answers were characterised by a tendency to focus on events rather than characters. Some answers lacked cohesive structure. Choices of character included Hero and one interesting answer on Don John that offered a lively and original approach to the question.

Question: How does Shakespeare present the theme of friendship in this play?

As in 4a, there were a small number of answers to this question. Weaker answers tried to discuss all friendships, resulting in a general and superficial outcome. Others focused on narrative, struggling to leave the Level 3 mark range. The most confident and successful responses focused on one or two characters and applied relevant quotations.

Questions 5a and 5b

Question: How does Shakespeare present the characters in this play who want an end to the feud?

This question attracted a large number of answers. On the whole it was addressed well at all ability levels. Candidates tackled the question with a number of different approaches, some selecting the 'Big 3' of Benvolio, Prince Escalus and Friar Lawrence as the main characters who wanted to end the feud. A significant number of well-supported, carefully structured answers were seen with contrasts drawn between Benvolio and Tybalt. Less successful answers listed those who wanted the feud to end with little evidence of argument or personal engagement. Some very pleasing responses were seen at Levels 4 and 5; these sought to analyse in depth and evaluated the place of their chosen characters in terms of their desire for peace. Many of these strong answers linked points well to social, cultural and historical contexts. Some answers that usually came in at Levels 2 and 3 concentrated on Romeo and Juliet as characters who wanted to see an end to the feud. This approach resulted in outcomes of varying success. Some Level 1 and low Level 2 answers relied almost entirely on narrative selection to answer.

Question: 'The Prologue does not spoil the play by revealing the ending.' How far do you agree with this view?

This answer was considerably less popular than 5a. The least successful responses relied heavily on narration with only passing reference to the Prologue. The best answers used aspects of the Prologue to build arguments related to the play's key themes such as fate and violence. Some of these dealt with Shakespeare's language and structure effectively, quoting selectively from The Prologue and using these points to build focused analysis. Some answers started well and ran out of steam half way through or resorted to recall.

Questions 6a and 6b

Question: What do we learn about the character of Cecily in this play?

Very few answers were seen. Those who attempted this question, in virtually all cases, had a secure and effective working knowledge of the play and presented answers that demonstrated engagement with not only Cecily as a character, but also Wilde's dramatic techniques in her presentation. Some well-chosen and timely references to social, cultural and historical context were seen in some answers.

Question: How does Wilde present the theme of friendship in this play?

This question attracted a very small number of answers. Most candidates who answered demonstrated thorough knowledge and understanding. Friendships tended to focus on Jack and Algernon, but there was mention of Dr Chasuble and Miss Prism and also the servants and their masters.

Questions 7a and 7b

Question: Explore Wilder's presentation of children in this play.

Only one or two answers to this question were seen. These tended to show secure knowledge and understanding of characters and awareness of the use of children to support the dramatic aims of the play.

Question: How does the title, *Our Town*, reflect the play's themes and ideas?

Only one or two responses were seen. These offered a discussion based on the importance of community and considered the nature of life in small town America.

Questions 8a and 8b

**Question: 'He is just what a young man ought to be...' (Jane)
How far do you agree with this description of Mr Bingley?**

Candidates were able to use the quotation in the question to develop personal arguments about the nature of Mr Bingley at different points in the novel. Some successful answers seen at Level 3 and above used this as an opportunity to consider his changing character as the novel progresses (while others argued that he does not change and is effectively more of a caricature in the novel than a three dimensional character). Quotation was used purposefully and with relevance in almost all answers seen. In the very few weaker answers marked, a lack of development was usually the reason for lack of achievement.

Question: Explore Austen's presentation of marriage in this novel.

This was more popular than 8a and attracted some genuinely excellent answers. Candidates who answered this question were nearly always well-prepared and able to comment with some authority on matters of social, cultural and historical significance. The importance of marriage in Regency England was linked to discussion of the Bennet family's situation and Charlotte Lucas's acceptance of Mr Collins with some use of very focused personal arguments. Lydia's fall from grace was a feature of many answers alongside the exploration of Darcy and Elisabeth's love story and, as one candidate described it, 'inevitable' marriage.

Questions 9a and 9b

Question: How does Harper Lee present the character of Calpurnia?

Most were able to write confidently about Calpurnia and considered her role as a surrogate mother to Jem and Scout as well as her place in the black community of Maycomb. Candidates working at Level 3 and above made good use of reference to the visit to church, the incident with the dog and defence of Walter Cunningham at the meal table. On the whole, these answers were a pleasure to read and offered some convincing personal arguments supported by close reference to the detail of the text.

Question: Explore the theme of suffering in the novel.

Candidates across the whole ability range answered this question with Level 1 achievement reflecting basic narrative approaches or undeveloped discussion for the most part. Level 2 answers tended to understand the theme a little more but became sketchy when they tried to back up their arguments. Level 3 responses tended to work through the different types of suffering in a logical way, considering Jem's physical suffering (broken bones), Scout's suffering in the racist environment of Maycomb, Miss Maudie's house burning down and of course Tom Robinson's unjust prosecution and treatment at the hands of Bob Ewell and the lynch mob. The best answers combined excellent knowledge of the novel with lucid and sophisticated arguments about the nature of suffering. Quotation was well integrated in these Level 4 and 5 answers.

Questions 10a and 10b

Question: 'Susila experiences very little happiness in *The English Teacher*.'

How far do you agree with this statement?

A small number of answers were seen to this question. These considered times when Susila experienced happiness e.g. her domestic happiness when she and Leela had settled in with Krishna and her relationship with him from the spirit world towards the end of the novel. One good answer used Susila's experiences to comment on the juxtaposition of happiness and sadness in life.

Question: How does Narayan present Indian culture and beliefs in this novel?

This question also attracted a small number of answers. Some of which used the contrast between the English Albert Mission College and Indian culture to build their arguments.

Questions 11a and 11b

Question: Who, in your opinion, suffers the most in this novel?

Explain your reasons.

This was by far the most popular question on the paper. It was encouraging to see achievement at all levels of ability, with many candidates demonstrating a deep knowledge and understanding of the novel and its characters. Those candidates who chose a limited number of characters (two or three) achieved most success, with those who tried to work through every single character in the novel producing more superficial answers that struggled to leave Level 2. This question gave candidates the opportunity to select their focus and a range of characters was considered. Top choices were Crooks, Candy, Curley's wife, Lennie and George, although one or two answers included Curley, arguing that the stress created by the Great Depression had made him bitter and angry. The strongest answers to this question discussed how a reader from the 1930s might have responded to the idea compared to readers of today. Better candidates also tried to evaluate the extent of suffering, using juxtaposition and structural references to support arguments. Weaker answers simply wrote a series of character studies with the aspect of suffering implicitly included. Quotation use varied, but when it was good it helped to develop coherent and, at times, scholarly engagement.

Question: How does Steinbeck present authority in the novel?

Overall, candidates produced answers that were firmly rooted in knowledge and understanding of the text. This question was less popular than 11a, but nevertheless attracted a very large number of answers. The most perceptive candidates, working at the top end of Level 4 and Level 5, relied on succinct, well-integrated support to support coherent and mature arguments. Weaker responses relied on the film version. There appeared to be little problem with candidates understanding the term, 'authority'. Many answers considered George's authority over Lennie, citing his care of Lennie in the novel's opening chapter (preventing him from petting dead mice and drinking from a stagnant pool) and his attempts to keep Lennie out of trouble by insisting he stay away from Curley's wife. Slim was another character who candidates felt represented authority and his god-like status was frequently referred to. The question proved to be very good at allowing candidates to develop different interpretations. In this way it was very supportive of personal engagement as candidates build coherent arguments and considered the meaning of authority e.g. '*Curley should have it but doesn't as the men do not respect him*'.

Questions 12a and 12b

Question: How does Taylor present the older generations of the Logan family?

Most answers focused on Big Ma and Uncle Hammer alongside Mama and Papa. Knowledge and understanding of these characters was largely secure and presented relevant support and development.

Question: Explore the importance of the natural environment in this novel.

This answer was less popular than 12a. Most considered details of context and built arguments around the significance of the land to the characters.

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