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# **Examiners' Report**

## Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2017

Pearson Edexcel International GCSE  
In English Literature (4ET0) Paper 02R

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## **Introduction**

There are two sections in the exam paper, equally weighted. In Section A, candidates have a choice between the unseen poem and the unseen prose extract. In Section B, they can choose Question 3, which has two named poems or Question 4, in which one poem is named and the candidate chooses a suitable poem to discuss with it. All questions carry 20 marks; 40 in total.

This was a very successful paper that did not receive any complaints or queries from centres. The paper was error free and no changes were made to the mark scheme. The feedback received from examiners has been very positive and a full range of marks has been awarded. This series has, once again, been very successful.

In both sections a full range of marks were awarded. Responses varied from the very brief and basic to the fully developed assured and perceptive. Overall, the quality of responses across the paper was very good, with some noticeably outstanding answers. Responses for both sections demonstrated strengths and some candidates continued on extra paper.

From series to series, strengths vary. This year, responses seem to be of a very high standard across the questions and very few Level 1 and 2 responses were seen.

The most popular question for Section A was the unseen poem. For Section B, there was a good balance of responses for Question 3 and Question 4.

There were very few Sec A and Sec B responses (where candidates had not crossed the appropriate question number).

## Section A Unseen Texts

### Question 1 Unseen Poem: *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* by Maya Angelou

**Question: Explain how the poet expresses her thoughts and ideas about the birds.**

There were many excellent and thoughtful responses for this question. Some candidates obviously benefited from their knowledge of the poet and were able to see the analogy between the caged bird and slavery; however, many others made this connection themselves, some tentatively at the end of their essay, and were able to go beyond a literal explanation. A large number simply saw it as cruelty to animals, but this did not necessarily reduce the quality of the writing or mark they received.

Candidates showed their connection and engagement with the central idea of the poem and all were upset or critical of the practice of denying freedom (to birds or humans). Some candidates were a bit too forensic in their analysis and actually missed the point altogether) and perhaps should have explored the surface meanings before trying to analyse in greater depth.

While many commented on the title (some even linking it to the Blues and gospel singing of slaves), a surprising number tended to ignore this. Many identified it as the desperate and painful desire the caged bird had for freedom and that this was all he had left. A small number made the interesting and perceptive point about the free bird not necessarily appreciating his freedom and taking it for granted as one candidate put it 'the free bird is always free and will never know how to savour freedom as much'.

One examiner commented: *"There is a tendency for candidates to employ a certain amount of 'purple prose' and use of language terminology which seem to hinder their actual understanding of the poem. There is also a need to praise the poet excessively for example, 'the esteemed poetess', but these types of phrases do show respect."*

Another examiner commented:

*"Language is the strength of the candidates' analyses, despite the overuse of terms. There was some use of informal, 'online language' or inappropriate for audience language creeping in, such as: "pretty ironic, right?" However, most candidates were able to make very successful comments on the effects of words and phrases in the poem and how together they make meaning. One candidate made up the word 'cagers' i.e. those who imprisoned the bird which actually fitted well into their response."*

Whilst another examiner commented:

*"Form is a weakness for many candidates. While they can often correctly identify the form they are unable to use this to further their argument. Similarly, structure seems to present difficulties. Many candidates are almost 'Sherlock Holmes-like' in combing through the poem and listing all the examples of commas, length of lines – but they do not know what to do with it. Such plodding and a little pedantic, approaches were often at the cost of real appreciation of the meaning of the poem. However, one can see that this is due to their desire to be as thorough as they can be in the time allowed in having to analyse an unseen poem."*

Finally, *"I think that the majority of candidates understood, were moved by and were able to write about successfully the poem 'I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings'"*

## **Question 2**

***Extract from: 12 Years a Slave by Solomon Northup***

***Question: Explain how the writer presents his experiences of being a prisoner in this extract.***

This was answered mostly very competently, especially when we remember that this is an unseen extract.

The best responses based their comments on the whole extract reflecting more of an understanding, whereas weaker candidates tended to write on some details but lost sight of the whole. In some cases, these candidates missed the vital piece of information (both in the introduction and within the extract) that this was autobiographical and written after the event being related. Leading to incorrect assumption that the slave dealer was actually another prisoner or otherwise unexplained how the writer knew his name.

There was some excellent discussion about the language employed – candidates were able to identify many linguistic devices and reflect on the effect these have on the reader. Many were enraged that anyone could be treated as Solomon Northup had been - some even suggesting that it is not just historical and that oppression still exists today. There were some strange interpretations of 'rattle' linking it to a dangerous rattle snake. Also, a number thought that 'meditation' was 'medication' and became muddled, thinking that Northup had been drugged.

Many struggled with or ignored form. A surprising number referred to the extract as a poem. Many successfully discussed the structure of the extract and how it builds up to the dreadful moment when the slaver dealer and turnkey are at the opened door.

Some candidates tend to paraphrase rather than analyse and some use excessive and lengthy quotations.

Examiner comments include:

*"Some candidates had both knowledge of the novel and history of slavery. This helped some but in some cases (not many) it led to more of a history essay than a close textual analysis of the extract."*

Another examiner commented:

*"It was clearly an unseen extract that candidates were able to appreciate, become engaged with and able to write about in an effective and successful way. One candidate wrote at the end 'I am really curious to know what happens next and I will lay my hands on this book after the exams'. Well, educators can't ask for more than that - an examination which encourages further reading!"*

## Section B Poetry Anthology

Of the two Anthology questions, Question 3 was more popular.

There was a good balance of responses for Question 3 and Question 4 and on the whole, candidates clearly understood the named poems.

Although there is no requirement to compare and contrast the poems for the current specification, a considerable majority of candidates did so. Some centres have sought clarification in the past and therefore this serves as a reminder for all centres who are still preparing students for this paper. For the current 4ET0 specification, the two poems **do not** have to be compared, but there should be some balance in the treatment of the two. It seems that in some cases, candidates were constrained by trying to find comparatives when they did not need to do this. I should like to draw all centres' attention to the third bullet in each of the marking levels. The bullet states that either *Limited, Some, Sound, Sustained or Perceptive 'connections are made between particular techniques used by the writer and presentation of ideas, themes and settings'*. It is important to note that this refers to each individual 'writer' and the 'connections' means that the candidate understands how the writer uses techniques to convey his or her ideas for each separate poem. 'Connections' is not an alternative for 'compare'. However, this is also a timely reminder that for the **new specification 4ET1 (from 2018), comparisons will be required.**

Centres are reminded that candidates should discuss the language, structure and form in both of the poems (they should structure their responses as they do for Section A, Unseen Poetry). Often, candidates will consider how the ideas are conveyed through language, but do not consider the structure and form. If candidates do not consider the structure and form, a mark lower in the appropriate level is applied. It is advised that centres look carefully at the mark grids and the wording in each bullet. The second bullet in each mark band is assessing the candidate's knowledge of the language, structure and form.

### Question 3

#### **How do people suffer in *La Belle dame Sans Merci* and *War Photographer*?**

Most marks awarded were Level 3 or above, with a number of candidates gaining full marks. For both Anthology questions, candidates have mostly compared the two poems – which they do not have to on this legacy specification (but this is a requirement on the new 4ET1).

The most successful candidates did not attempt stanza by stanza comparison or try to suggest that the suffering was in any way the same. These candidates commenced with comments which suggested the type of suffering each poem had as its subject. For example, 'love' and 'war'. The weaker candidates tried to force similarities and also attempted to switch from one poem to the other so frequently that they lost the thread of their argument.

Given that these poems are from the Anthology and therefore known to the candidates, it is always interesting to find that this is not always reflected in the quality of their responses. While there has to be a balance between

'learned knowledge' of a poem and the analysis of the poem in front of the candidate in the exam, many did not know important aspects which then meant their arguments were less secure. There was some excessive quoting from *La Belle Dame sans Merci* with a tendency to paraphrase.

Examiner comments include:

"There was no question of the candidates' sincerity and engagement, even if their writing was, at times, a little plodding. Those who had been told to compare often struggled to find relevant comparisons and desperately looked for links, such as trying to find similar messages or techniques."

"*War Photographer* was generally handled better. Candidates seemed to find the subject matter and the language more accessible. Many stated their preference for this poem. Context is not assessed, but some did consider contextual points. Only some were able to use knowledge of the poet, and the wars mentioned in the poem to their advantage. A few candidates made reference to the 1972 photograph of the Vietnamese girl, Kim Phuc. The one example that could have been fruitfully compared with *La Belle Dame sans Merci* was the reference to 'Rural England'."

Another examiner commented: "Literary devices and biblical/religious analogies were picked up on and usually successfully discussed in terms of the effect these have on the reader and why the poet employed them. Of course there were many who simply noted this."

Again, there was often excessive praise for the poets e.g. 'the effect on the reader was magical as though a spell had been cast', but this does not ever go against the candidate - it is good to think that these candidates are 'in thrall' of the poets' skills.

#### **Question 4**

**Show how the poets explore people treating others badly in *Telephone Conversation* and one other poem from the Anthology.**

Most candidates dealt successfully with *Telephone Conversation* although very few failed to see the humour or sarcasm used by Wole Soyinka. A number had knowledge of the poet and the time the poem was set, which added depth to their responses.

Most, if not all, were outraged with the speaker's treatment. Language was successfully dealt with, most noting the use of capitalisation and symbolism of colour for example.

The most successful and popular choice for comparison was *Once Upon a Time* though many resorted to excessive quoting. Other successful choices were, *Prayer Before Birth* and *My Last Duchess*. Less successful choices were *If-*, *Do not gentle into that good night*, *La Belle Dame sans Merci*, *Half-past Two* and *Hide and Seek*. Candidates seemed, at times, desperate to force the comparison or to try to satisfy the question (of being 'badly treated').

Generally this question resulted in a range of responses very rarely below Level 2 and certainly up to and beyond Level 5.

## **General**

This paper has been a pleasure to mark and the responses have been very enjoyable to read.

## **Conclusion**

Overall, this has been a very successful paper and a full range of marks has been awarded across all questions, with many candidates gaining full marks.

Where candidates were less successful, literary devices had either been identified without explanation or were simply listed. Greater success would be achieved if candidates analysed specific areas of the text and developed their ideas, supporting them with relevant examples. 'Feature-spotting' is no substitute for detailed analysis. The ability to examine the writer's methods and to connect these with the ideas and feelings in the poems were often the most successful responses. More comment relating to the effect on the reader would have benefited some candidates' responses.

The handling of form and structure was sometimes disappointing. For Section A there was often a mention of stanza, rhyming schemes and repetition, but comment was often minimal as to how these contributed to the thoughts and feelings in the text. In some cases, particularly for Section B, candidates had not considered structure and form at all.

Students should be reminded that they must write about two poems in Section B and, for each poem, they should consider the language, structure and form when answering the question.

Centres are advised to make greater use of past papers and Sample Assessment Materials (SAMs), available on-line, in order to make candidates more aware of question format and structure.

In some cases, more time needs to be given to the teaching of the *Anthology* poems in order to allow candidates the opportunity to access the full range of marks available. There was evidence of accomplished work produced during the examination and centres should be congratulated on the thorough preparation of their candidates.

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Chief / Principal Examiner

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