

Examiners' Report Summer 2008

O Level

O Level English Language (7161)

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7161/01

The candidates responded well to the demands of the paper, largely demonstrating clear understanding of what was required of them. Although the passages were challenging, candidates showed a willingness to engage with them and to respond thoughtfully.

There is no doubt that the idiomatic expressions in the second passage pushed candidates to their limits of understanding but there was a clear desire to grasp the gist and the better candidates were able to make contextual inferences.

Section A

Q1

Candidates had to be accurate in giving the reasons why Emil woke up and most answered well.

Q2

The majority of candidates quoted appropriately.

Q3

This was more taxing and the better candidates were able to read the passage carefully rather than speculate without evidence.

Q4

There were a number of possible correct answers and candidates were required to show literal understanding of the passage.

Q5

It was important for candidates to read the requirements of the question very carefully. This was a test of empathetic understanding and it was necessary for them to identify with the likely emotions of both Emil and his grandmother, as well as reworking relevant material from the passage. Successful candidates presented a dialogue, used appropriate material from the passage and avoided the temptation to invent too much extraneous detail. The advice on word limits should not result in omitting necessary material.

Q6

The key element in this question was to present material in the candidate's own words. This proved to be a successful discriminator as synonyms required candidates to search their vocabulary scrupulously.

Q7

Most candidates were able to succeed if their understanding of the passage was sound.

Q8

Candidates should avoid recounting the narrative in this kind of question. Most were able to opt for a personal preference but the highest marks could only be accessed when meaningful comments about language and expression were included. Candidates should be discouraged from making sweeping comments such as: "both passages used paragraphs well". It is important to make a small number of specific comments about language supported by brief quotations.

Dismissive statements of the kind that one passage was “boring” are to be discouraged. A minority of candidates are still writing too much in their answers, a mistake which can waste valuable time.

Section B

Q9

This question asked for two statements written in the first person from two distinct perspectives. Many candidates answered in the third person and lost marks accordingly.

This tested understanding of the passage in a way that was not unduly compromised by the colloquialisms of the passage. The main requirement was for candidates to think their way into the minds of the characters involved. Candidates should not feel too restricted by word count, which is provided for advice more than a requirement.

Section C

Q10a

This was the second most popular of the essay questions. The most successful candidates combined close knowledge of written English with originality. It is of no advantage to reproduce the narrative of one or other of the passages and candidates should be discouraged from writing prepared essays which do not freshly engage with the title.

Q10b

A minority of candidates attempted this question but those that did produced well-structured and considered arguments. Examiners often commented on the high standard of candidates’ work when answering this question.

Q10c

This was the most popular choice. Candidates who structured their accounts most carefully gained access to the highest marks.

English Language, 7161 Grade Boundaries

Grade	A	B	C	D	E
Lowest mark for award of grade	64	56	49	44	39

Note: Grade boundaries may vary from year to year and from subject to subject, depending on the demands of the question paper.

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