

Examiners' Report Summer 2009

O Level

O Level English Literature (7171)

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O Level English Literature: 7171 01

General Comments

In general, a good standard of work was much in evidence in the 2009 examination series, reflecting solid preparation by students and centres. Some very good essays demonstrated mature insight into the texts as communicated through detailed analysis of a writer's techniques rather than a retelling of the narrative or a character study. However, some candidates continue to merely offer general comment and often this is not in relation to the specific question posed. Time spent by centres addressing examination technique will therefore prove invaluable.

Detailed Comments

Section A: Drama

Question 1a50

Lower band marks were awarded to those candidates who simply préciséd the passage and didn't fully address the issue of friendship. It remains vital that candidates spend equal amounts of time on both parts of the question as invariably one part is not handled in as much detail as the other part. The issue of Cassius's development was therefore in the main very generally addressed with a number of candidates repeating material from the extract rather than referring to the play as a whole.

Question 1b

A number of responses simply listed a range of supernatural occurrences in the play with varying degrees of success, but a good number of candidates clearly took heed of the terms of the question and explored the methods used to convey the supernatural. There were also some valid contextual references to how Elizabethan audiences would respond to the supernatural.

Question 1c

Higher band answers offered detailed discussion on the topics of loyalty and friendship, with suitable reference to the plot and equally conveyed an understanding of the relationship between Brutus and Portia. Lower band responses tended to offer a brief, largely narrative response

Question 2a

A majority of responses recognised Katherine's unhappiness and the causes of it, and the duality of Bianca's nature. Lower band responses tended to offer a brief, largely narrative response.

Question 2b

Lists of elements of deceit were common, but the better ones did identify a theme running though the play, including Bianca's hidden shrewish nature.

Question 2c

Few responses offered and these were largely narrative in scope.

Question 3

Only two limited responses were offered in response to questions on The Winslow Boy.

Question 4a

Lower band candidates fell back on the safer option of commenting in general on Tom's character while other students were rewarded by also exploring the effect of Williams' stagecraft.

Question 4b

A number of engaging interpretive responses were provided especially those which explored how all the main characters were imprisoned in one way or another.

Question 4c

Some very good responses offered here displaying understanding of both Laura's character and situation.

Section B: Poetry

Question 5

Most responses were empathetic but there was also evidence of considerable misunderstanding for instance, some candidates thought that actual hoard of silver had been found or that it was raining. Equally several candidates preferred to offer lectures about global warming as opposed to addressing the question focus. Centres should advise candidates that this is a demanding question on the paper and they may be well advised to opt for the questions on texts which they have already studied. Higher band marks will only be awarded to those candidates who indicate good understanding of the poem and provide detailed analysis of a range of poetic devices employed by the poet.

Question 6

Numerous candidates chose appropriate poems with La Belle Dame sans Merci and When We Two Parted being the most popular. Many valid comparative points and interesting comments on the use and effect of poetic techniques were presented. However, responses addressing poems such as Slave's Dream, Island Man and War Photographer, equally produced detailed consideration of how emotions were evoked through the use of a range of poetic methods. Caution should be exercised to avoid a moralising tone when addressing poems with subjects such as the horrors of war and slavery.

Question 7

Although a number of responses lapsed into general character study and / or narrative, several candidates did offer a consideration of how poetic methods conveyed aspects of the Lady of Shalott with some identifying her as representative of the artist isolated from society and/or the repressed Victorian female.

Section C: Prose Pre - 1950

Overall, responses reflected solid knowledge and understanding of the texts studied.

However, as has been highlighted before, candidates must avoid retelling the narrative as those who do so, cannot hope to achieve the higher band marks.

As in previous years, The Great Gatsby proved popular. Candidates appeared to enjoy the question about morality and immorality exploring the shocking behaviour at Gatsby's parties, the downside of the American dream, bootlegging, and extramarital affairs. Few found much morality except in Nick, although the more discerning pointed out some good aspects of Gatsby's character.

For the question about *Gatsby*, higher band candidates made effective use of the text to support their viewpoints. Most candidates addressed the fact that money hadn't made *Gatsby* happy nor allowed him access to Daisy, and that his end was a sad and lonely one.

Answers to the first question on *Far From the Madding Crowd* tended to provide mostly narrative responses and many candidates didn't seem able to relate the story to the question posed. The second question provided better essays with many successfully arguing, in a detailed and justified manner, that it was not an appropriate ending.

One of the key aspects of success for the *Nineteenth Century Stories* is the selection of the most appropriate stories and this was the case for the first question on this text. Here for example, the black humour of *Hopfrog* and *The Stolen Bacillus* was handled best. Many attempted to find humour in *The Adventures of the Speckled Band*, and *The Yellow Wallpaper*, without much success. The second question on this text provided mostly narrative responses with little consideration of how the theme of love was actually presented in terms of the methods used.

Questions on *Brave New World* were only attempted by a small minority of candidates. Responses to both questions tended to be reliant on general narrative and character study.

The question relating to setting in *Northanger Abbey* was not very popular. A few candidates identified the frivolous society in Bath and the Gothic nature of the Abbey, but the majority listed events that occurred in each place. The question about Henry Tilney proved extremely popular and overall was well answered. A good number of candidates provided detailed arguments in respect of the statement posed with personal views clearly justified and supported with close reference to the text.

Section D: Prose Post-1950

Responses to texts in this section were not as well developed as in previous series. This was most notable with *Things Fall Part* and *The Village by the Sea* which disappointingly, were characterised by narration of events and reliance on character study. Centres should endeavour to make candidates aware that this is not what examiners are seeking and will not warrant high band marks.

On the other hand, both questions set on *My Family and Other Animals* produced sound and generally well-developed responses. Candidates engaged with the question about Margo and Mother offering good textual detail in support of points raised while many of the key humorous moments were cited for the second question. Again centres should make candidates aware that such questions require a consideration of how the episodes are humorous and not just stating that they are humorous.

To Sir with Love yet again proved popular and although there were many lapses into narrative, many candidates were able to offer some justified argument in relation to both questions posed, for instance in terms of arguing that Sir experienced more isolation at the start of the novel but by the end this was no longer the case.

The Chrysalids is not a popular text, but the question on Uncle Axle evidently allowed candidates to convey their sound understanding of his character and the role that he played.

O Level English Literature: 7171 01 Grade Boundaries

Paper No	A	B	C	D	E
Lwr	82	67	53	45	34

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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