

GCSE (9-1)

Examiners' report

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

J351

For first teaching in 2015

J351/02 Summer 2018 series

Version 1

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Introduction

Our examiners' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the examinations. They provide useful guidance for future candidates. The reports will include a general commentary on candidates' performance, identify technical aspects examined in the questions and highlight good performance and where performance could be improved. The reports will also explain aspects which caused difficulty and why the difficulties arose, whether through a lack of knowledge, poor examination technique, or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

Where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report. A full copy of the question paper can be downloaded from OCR.

Paper J351/02 series overview

J351/02 is one of two examined components for the new GCSE (9-1) English Language examination which was first examined in 2017.

The main difference between the two components is that J351/01 assesses candidates' response to non-fiction texts whereas J351/02 assesses their response to literary texts. Each of the components follows a similar structure and tests the same assessment objectives. The exception is that in Question 2 of J351/01 candidates must synthesise information from two texts. This skill is not tested in the same way in J351/02.

To do well in this component candidates must be able to read unseen texts with confidence and understanding. They should also be able to select relevant details from the text and identify and explain features of language and structure. They must also be able to identify similarities and contrasts between the texts and evaluate the impact of each text on a reader.

This is the third session in which this component has been examined, following sessions in June and November 2017. It is clear that centres have learnt a good deal from previous experience and this was reflected especially in the evaluation element of question 4 on each paper. However, candidates might still gain more marks by developing their responses to language and structure, AO2 which is tested in Q3 of Component 01 and Q2 and Q3 of Component 2.

J351/02 Exploring Effects and Impact

Overall the paper elicited some interesting responses. The passages had been understood and there was significant evidence that candidates had been carefully prepared for the paper's many requirements. Candidates of all abilities were afforded opportunities to show their skills and knowledge in English. There were very few candidates who were unable to complete the paper or for whom the reading texts were beyond comprehension.

Section A overview

It is critical that candidates attempt all four of the questions. In order to do so successfully it is essential that they spend sufficient time reading and pondering both passages before they start to write. This will vary from candidate to candidate, so all must have a good idea of how long that will take before they go into the examination. The questions all require specifically detailed responses which emanate from a confident overview of the texts and their contexts as well as relevant detail of the language choices the writers have made and their effects. The improvements in the layout of the answer booklet clearly helped candidates with their time management this year.

Candidates should ensure that their answers refer precisely to the questions being asked and where appropriate, fall within the parameters set by the terms of the question. They should avoid mere description and paraphrase in answers to Q2-4 as this will limit the number of marks available to them. Candidates should select appropriate concise references to support what they say: unsupported assertion is not rewarded. They should explain the effects of their selected references in relation to the set task. In responses to Q4 candidates must compare the texts in the light of the detail of the task.

Candidates should ensure that references to subject terminology are there to support and further develop response to task and text. Too many candidates make mention rhetorical devices without sufficient explanation of their use or effect. As one team leader put it 'subject terminology is a good servant but a bad master'.

Question 1(a)

1 Look again at lines 1–8.

(a) Give **two** examples of the men's poor diet up to this moment.

.....
..... [2]

The vast majority of candidates answered the question and got full marks. Some wrote too much or gave incorrect references, for example 'wolf like hunger' which does not describe diet. Candidates are advised (as always) to read the question very carefully before seeking out the answer. Acorn coffee and thin donkey soup were the required phrases: if they, or one of them, was given in addition to an incorrect reference, one mark was credited.

Exemplar 1

(a) Give **two** examples of the men's poor diet up to this moment.

"wearying of our acorn coffee" and thin donkey soup!
"persuaded an old farmer to part with three chickens" [2]
each of which looked as hungry as we were!

The first line gives both relevant points but then adds excess.

Exemplar 2

(a) Give **two** examples of the men's poor diet up to this moment.

"acorn coffee"
"thin donkey soup" [2]

Simple full mark response.

Question 1(b)

(b) Explain how **one** detail suggests that the chickens will **not** make a good meal.

.....
..... [2]

All the candidates who attempted the question got the right idea: most said that because the chickens were 'bony' (or 'hungry') they would not make much of a meal. The question differs from 1a because candidates have to make a (simple) inference to get the second mark.

Exemplar 3

They are described as "bony" suggesting they lack lots of meat due to their own hunger. There will [2] be less meat in the stew.

Good example of a full mark response.

Question 2

Question 2 is about **Text 1, A Moment of War** by Laurie Lee.

2 Look again at lines 24–33.

How does Laurie Lee use language and structure to present the men's increasing pleasure at the thought of their meal?

You should use relevant subject terminology to support your answer.

.....
.....
.....

[6]

Far too many candidates reference parts of speech incorrectly. It is better to avoid them if they have not been fully understood. Many candidates still believe that 'structure' equals sentence structure. For sentence lengths to be a rewardable feature of AO2 answers have to be defined, exemplified and analysed for specific effects. The strongest candidates showed a confident understanding of (for example) 'voluptuous' and 'consummated' to give precise, full answers. Others thought that 'consummated' was 'consumed': a very different interpretation; and the 'swimming' chickens were referenced as personification which didn't always make full sense. The phrase 'long moment' was a key discriminator: some candidates took this to be 'impatience' while stronger ones saw this as part of the 'swooning' pleasure of anticipation.

Candidates should be careful to include references to what is in the prescribed lines of the text only. This section was deliberately set to support candidate's sense of structure. Many identified the sibilance/alliteration/assonance of 'splendid, succulent' etc. Fewer candidates understood how to make that a relevant part of their response. Another good discriminator was whether or not candidates picked up on the spiritual/ religious/ ritualistic aspect of the passage. Where this was seen much insight usually followed.

Other successful points were ones which compared the 'thick' soup with the 'thin'; various military allusions 'guard' etc. and the contrast between the calm of the starving soldiers and the fussing and quarrelling of the sisters.

Marks are not credited to candidates who comment on devices NOT used by the writer.

Exemplar 4

Laurie Lee uses language and structure to present the men's increasing pleasure at the thought of their meal in a variety of ways. In such way she doth it through her vibrant and colourful language. The use of words ~~such as~~ and phrases such as "a tarnished steaming link" and splendidly recharged with succulence" ~~can~~ convey the Indict pleasure ~~at~~ at the thought of their meal. ~~They~~ These quotations do this as they show the narrator to be so hungry that even such a simple meal could cause him to derive such pleasure from it ~~as~~ because of hungry he is. The sense of pleasure is conveyed through the use of ~~the~~ exaggerated language as he is so pleased by the meal it causes him to use such over the top words.

Structure is also used to present the men's increasing pleasure ~~at~~ through the use of long sentences. These long sentences are used to show just how pleased they are at the thought of their meal as they ~~can~~ show their "long ~~as~~ moment of delayed consummation" through the idea that the long sentences mirror their long awaited pleasure.

This is an example of a middle range response which balances language and structure.

Question 3

Question 3 is about **Text 2**, *All That Matters* by Wayson Choy.

3 Look again at lines 4–28.

Explore how the writer makes the preparations for the meal so tense.

Support your ideas by referring to the language and structure of this section, using relevant subject terminology.

[12]

.....
.....
.....

Too many candidates misunderstood the question here and did not see that it is about 'tension'. There were many possible interpretations of this and plenty of available evidence to back it up but if the answer was devoted to the delicious food it was unlikely to be able to access all available marks. Those that stuck with the task as set developed strong responses which saw both the tensions of the grandmother's kitchen dictatorship and the hate / hate relationship between Jenny and the narrator.

A relatively small minority of candidates grasped the meaning or significance of 'scrawny Mrs. Leong and pudgy Mrs. Wong' but there was much good work built on references to the grandmother and the narrator. The former's sense of status, urgency, sarcasm and dominance and the latter's grudging, sulky, brusque retorts were well seen and deployed.

As previously discussed, references to subject terminology were always best when supported by concise, relevant examples and explanation of effect on the reader.

Question 4

Question 4 is about **Text 1**, *A Moment of War* by Laurie Lee and **Text 2**, *All That Matters* by Wayson Choy.

4 'Both texts powerfully present how a meal can appeal to the senses.'

How far do you agree with this statement?

In your answer you should:

- discuss the narrators' different feelings while the meal is prepared and eaten
- explain how far each meal appeals to the senses
- compare the ways the writers present preparing or eating a meal.

Support your response with quotations from **both** texts.

[18]

.....
.....
.....

A very pleasing feature this year was the improvement in the structuring of responses to this task. Most candidates wrote about one passage and then the next with a range of apt connectives. Better answers managed the prized 'interwoven responses' described in level 6. All but the weakest answers managed three or more successful linked points or wrote about one passage and then went on to a series of comparatives thereafter.

Most candidates balanced what they wanted to say on the texts fairly equally. Fewer than previously wrote predominantly on only one of them.

More candidates were brave enough to begin with a phrase like 'I agree to some/ a certain extent' which made for evaluative answers from the start.

As the bullet points suggested there could be, and indeed was, a very wide interpretation of 'senses' overwhelmingly, or at least unhelpfully for some.

It was good to see many stronger answers which had the self-confidence and wherewithal to challenge the task in detail and in principle rather than simply offer slavish agreement. The former often included reference to the spiritual dimension of the first passage and compared it to the regal one of the second. Too many of the latter, weaker responses said that the meal in the first passage was horrible, unappetising and disgusting and compared to the richer fare of the second. Many candidates compared the very different preparations and referenced matters of seating and cutlery and so on.

Smell, sight and taste were the sense experiences most often referred to.

Exemplar 5

I agree with the statement, but I also believe that the two texts focus greatly on the power of a meal to change a person.

In both texts, there is a direct consideration of characters as animalistic, to show the transformation that occurs when a meal arrives. Lee considers the soldiers' almost wolf-like hunger, while in text 2, the narrator was "like a hungry bear". The similes used convey a wild, inhuman reaction to food or lack of food, and therefore suggest that meals appeal to our senses in a way which reveals natural instincts. Jenny

Chong is described as having "eyes of a hundred", with Chong's comparison ~~implies~~ ^{implies} feelings of predation and competition for food. The author of text 2

focuses on our characters' reactions to the meal, whereas text 1 considers the anticipation more.

Lee contrasts ~~in~~ their "sullen rual" against their appetite, showing how the meal has the power to suppress the animal instincts and return to a sophisticated

lifestyles. While text 1 considers a meal to appeal to the senses in a way which reduces animal instincts, the text 2 emphasises how the temptation of the meal evokes a primal reaction.

Both writers also develop a strong sense of anticipation in their texts, emphasising the reveal of the meal by creating excitement in the reader. Lee deeply extends the description through use of adjectives "long and delayed" to represent the impatience of the soldiers. Choy, on the other hand, draws the narrator away from the meal, focusing on the suspense of only having two free chairs. While Lee describes the "slabs of grey bread", Choy explores the way the table is set, and in withholding the meal, the text emulates how our narrators feel. We, as readers, become impatient with the ~~use~~ inclusion of uninteresting and arguably irrelevant details about the setting, so the text evokes the same primal reactions in ~~use~~ us as the meals did in the texts. What is particularly effective in both texts is the way the authors refuse to provide details about the meal until near the end, encouraging our enthusiasm to match the soldiers and the narrator.

LNK

Finally, we should consider the actual depiction of the meals, although both writers elected to ~~use~~ the "less is more" technique, only including a few sentences.

✓ of description in both. Both authors explain the effect of smells — swimming aromas in text 1 and delicious smells of Choy's work. Lee almost personifies the fragrances as she describes their active movement through the air, while Choy opts for a simple, yet unambiguous meaning, as an appealing smell. The sight of the steam is also developed well, text 2 describing it as a rich broth and steaming majestically, and text 1 describing a thick soup [...], splendidly rechristened. Lee's positioning of the adverbial phrase (after the noun) emphasises its part of the description — to the soldiers, the succulence was more important than the soup, so we as the reader see this last. The mystery and might of the meal is considered by Choy, evoking understanding about how the soup is impressive and admirable. Above all, though, these descriptions are accentuated by the prolonged anticipation throughout the text, and the reveal emphasises how the characters react with pleasure and satisfaction.

Overall, I do believe that both Lee and Choy effectively portray the meals as influential and the sensory descriptions are developed with sophistication. However, they also consider the effect of a meal to transform one's psychology, revealing or suppressing inner primal flesh desires.

The first and last paragraphs of a full mark essay.

Exemplar 6

I agree that both texts powerfully present how a meal can appeal to the senses due to a variety of reasons.

Throughout both texts, extremely descriptive and vivid writing is used to paint a picture of the ~~extraordinary~~ how the extraordinary food is appealing to their sense. In text 1, the meal is shown to be appealing to their senses through the way in which the narrator describes it. The narrator states that while the food was being prepared, the smell ~~about~~ and sight made them swoon with hunger. Swoon is a word commonly associated with love, and the fact that it is used here shows their deep love for the meal which they are about to consume, conveying just how powerfully the meal is appealing to their sense. The way in which the food is described as smelling also shows how powerfully it appeals to their sense of smell. The smell is described as being "tripping with" aroma, which is a word used to describe something that smells amazing. The smell so powerfully appeals to their senses that it even makes the soldiers think of the long forgotten juice of real home-cooked food. The fact the smell conjures up such powerful images shows the extent to which a meal can appeal to the sense.

When the food is served in text 1, the narrator comments on how it looks, showing just how powerfully it conveys to their sense of sight. The soup is described as being "splendidly recharged with succulence" which shows just how wonderful and rejuvenating the broth appears to them.

meal

In text 2, the ~~meal~~ is ~~not~~ shown to powerfully appeal to the senses, largely through the language used. The language used when describing the meal conveys just how powerfully it appeals to the narrator's senses. The meal is described as "golden brown steaming" and "majestic", with "crystals of melon laying" in a rich broth. The fact that everyone sighed with "delight" upon being presented the meal shows just how happy it made everyone feel. While preparing the food, the ladies are described as "exclaiming over the delicious smells". This shows how powerfully the smell of the meal appealed to their senses as they all felt the need to comment on the beauty of its aroma. The use of metaphors of people being described as powerful animals also shows how much the meal appealed to their senses. Jenny Chong is described as having a "tigress's empty belly" and the narrator as a "hungry bear" shows just how powerfully the ~~first~~ meal appealed to the senses. ~~or~~ the use of powerful animals conveys this.

This is a good way to engage the task.

Section B overview

Writing

Candidates should not spend time on the writing question to the detriment of the reading questions: the latter should take longer. It is NOT advisable to do the writing task first.

All work should be checked, and time should be built in for this.

Candidates should seek to establish one main verb tense and stick to it.

Almost all candidates responded well to the tasks with even the weakest attempting to manipulate language with varying degrees of success. The best work was truly amazing, especially when you consider that these are 16-year-old candidates working under extreme pressure in a limited time frame. Many were sophisticated, very accurate and mature. A testament to much hard work and effective teaching.

There was a significant increase in the number of essays which concerned themselves with arguably inappropriate material with many more than previously being raised as exceptions. Not only is this offensive to examiners but also self-penalising in the sense that they are topics which have not been fully understood, or, indeed understood at all.

Too many candidates still write too much sacrificing accuracy, clarity and control for the sake of getting to or getting closer to the end of long, unwieldy narratives. Candidates who fully understand how to use sentences and paragraphs simply write better, as do those who have a realistic idea about how much they can write in a given time span.

There are still too many candidates whose work lapses very quickly into comma spliced, uncontrolled, shapeless general narrative. There were, however many fewer very long answers this year. Three sides ought to be perfectly sufficient to access the full range of marks available.

Question 5

EITHER

5 *Hunger satisfied.*

Use this as the title for a story.

In your writing you should:

- choose a clear viewpoint
- describe the setting
- explore your characters' thoughts and feelings about the hunger and how it was satisfied.

[40]*

On balance this was the more popular task of the two offered, although many of the essays would have fitted either task very well. For example, an essay on waiting: for a meal in a restaurant and another on hunger: at the end of the wait for GCSE results. There was some very good work in which the narrative was an anthropomorphised beast of prey. The meals of choice which satisfied the hunger were many and various but the most popular was a home cooked roast dinner. Many candidates took a non-literal approach and although much good work about ambition, desire and longing was elicited this also led to less appropriate work which I allude to above. Rough sleeping was another popular choice which worked well.

Exemplar 7

The snake waits peacefully for the right time to strike. It knows that if it moves too early, it could lose its prey and it would go hungry. Yet again, anticipation causes deadly venom to drip from its waiting fangs as it lingers in the tall grass, hiding from the deer. The snake is easily more than ten feet in length, amazingly able to swallow the deer with no difficulty.

Silently, it cautiously moves through the grass, pausing at short intervals. It feels the smoothness of its own sand-coloured scales brushing uncomfortably against the blades of grass. Unbeknownst to the deer, it draws ever closer, finally stopping when it's a mere few feet away.

With one brutally powerful lunge, the snake latches onto the deer, flinging the rest of its body up and over its back. The deer bucks, screaming in immense agony as the snake's fangs dig deeper and deeper into its jugular. Blood spews at unimaginable angles, coating both animals in its thick, red

consistency:

Eventually, the deer begins to slow its vain sprints to escape, knowing that death is inevitable. It gives a few faint kicks before the snake begins its final stage in the killing.

Its upper half wraps itself around the deer's neck. In comparison, it is quite small, and therefore an easy task for the predator. It begins to meticulously constrict around the

beast's windpipe, biting ~~deeper~~ ^{further} into its flesh as it does. The rest of the snake's body catches up and finally, its whole body encircles the deer's head and neck.

It waits for what seems like an excruciatingly long time before its victim's prey is dead. Once it is, the snake ~~lays~~ ^{lays} ~~lays~~ its fangs from the deer's windpipe. The blood has already coagulated, forming a thick, jelly-like substance that flashes ^{dark} ~~dark~~ ^{dark} burgundy. Slowly but surely, the snake unravels itself from the lifeless corpse and pursues its task of eating it.

This is a good example of how to position the reader.

Question 6

OR

6 Write about a time when you were waiting for something.

You could write about:

- the details which made this wait memorable
- your thoughts and feelings about the experience of waiting
- the way you feel about that experience now.

[40]*

There were many accounts of awaiting much desired objects: football boots, mobile phones etc. These most often concluded with an account of the pleasures (and sometimes the virtues) of delayed gratification. There were also many accounts of waiting for less concrete desires: love, admiration, attention etc. One sympathised with the many candidates who wrote about the terror of GCSE results day and the ways in which it ruined the summer holidays.

Exemplar 8

[40]*

6) Dread. Anxiety. That ~~wait~~ the recognisable terror.
 "It would all be ~~over~~ ✓ I told myself, clinging desperately onto the idea of reassurance. And yet I still felt as helpless as any prey would in the face of danger. ✓

The minutes ticked by, seconds evaporating instantaneously.
 I just wanted it to end. – to be freed from this weighty burden, to be liberated from this toothache. ~~It~~ ✓ I knew it would end. And yet, the only person who would – could – do so was myself. ✓

"Not long left now," my lips quivering tumultuously as I spoke. Never before had I been so prepared and so unprepared simultaneously. The papers were out now. ✓

My hand—it shook ~~genuinely~~ ^{genuinely}; every part of me
Craved an escape, an impossible escape.

My hand — it shook feverishly; my heart fluttered uncontrollably; my breathing, racing itself; every part of me craved an escape. The clock ticked over to 9 o'clock and the room glowed with a cacophony of folding paper, and the hollowness of everyone's dread sunk even lower. The nits or dandruff needed to meet us all.

This is the opening paragraph of a full mark essay.

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