



Examiners' Report

January 2013

International GCSE English Literature
(4ET0)

Paper 1

Level 1/Level 2 Certificate in English
Literature
(KET0)

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Introduction

There are two sections in the exam paper, equally weighted. In Section A, candidates answer one question on a Drama text and in section B candidates answer one question on a Prose text. There are 7 play texts and 6 prose texts to choose from. Questions are worth 30 marks each and the paper as a whole constitutes 60% of the marks for this qualification. This series saw responses that covered the whole ability range. The most popular text was 'Of Mice and Men' with the 11(a) question inviting most answers. 'Pride and Prejudice', 'Romeo and Juliet', 'A View from the Bridge' and 'An Inspector Calls' were also frequently answered on by candidates.

A View from the Bridge

Question 1(a) proved popular with candidates studying this text. The best responses considered the phrasing of the quotation in terms of Eddie breaking 'all' the rules, considering a range of aspects including Eddie's relationship with his niece, family and community. Some very good analysis was seen from candidates working, effectively supported by quotation and/or textual reference. Less confident responses struggled with the 'How far...' element of the question, resulting in a tendency to narrate or deal with events bluntly rather than analytically. These responses were often one dimensional in that they dealt with only one of the ways in which Eddie broke rules.

Question 1(b) was less popular than (a). Some candidates struggled with the definition of 'community' leading to misunderstanding and some vague and unspecific responses from less confident candidates. There was a clear distinction in responses to this question between those who applied skills of analysis in their reference to the ways in which community is explored and those who narrated elements of the play where issues of community were most significant. Only those candidates working at the top level engaged fully with the whole text on this question.

An Inspector Calls

Question 2(a) resulted in some very good responses with the most able candidates exploring Priestley's style and craft in relation to the issue of Eva's role in the play. Some discussed her 'reality' with originality and sophistication. Most candidates demonstrated that they understood the terms of the question with some less confident responses relying on narrative in various degrees. Some successfully analysed Eva's role/significance via her interaction with, and impact on, the other characters in the play. Candidates across the ability range demonstrated secure knowledge of the whole play in most instances (commensurate with ability).

Question 2(b) was confidently answered by many candidates who enjoyed discussing this 'classic' question. Most responses demonstrated good knowledge of the text and support was used appropriately to back up comments made. Within the lower levels more narrative approaches were seen and, in the least effective, a tendency to brevity and patchy development of ideas.

Henry V

Question 3(a) was answered by very few candidates. In responses seen, the 'Do you agree...' aspect of the question was only partially dealt with. Quotation was used with variable security and success, and candidates attempted to deal with Henry's speeches, sometimes losing their way and resorting to narrative. Some effective personal responses were seen but not developed or thoroughly explained.

Question 3(b) was answered by very few candidates. The theme of violence was more comprehensively dealt with than cruelty which appeared to offer a more demanding challenge. As in 3(a) there was evidence of some effective personal response and use of the text to support points made.

Much Ado About Nothing

Question 4(a) was answered by very few candidates. The presentation of Don Pedro and Claudio was explored with relevance and support. Some considered argument featured in responses seen, offering personal engagement with the text. The question offered candidates the opportunity to succeed at all ability levels.

Question 4(b) was not answered in this series.

Romeo and Juliet

Question 5(a) was extremely popular and resulted in responses across the full ability range. Some candidates struggled to balance their response between Mercutio and Romeo with a number writing considerably more about one character than the other. Some candidates wrote largely about the Baz Luhrman film version of the play which limited their analysis and ability to respond personally to the text. In some cases, exclusive reference to the portrayal of Mercutio in this film did not help candidates to achieve. Whilst it is helpful to reflect on and support study with film interpretations of the play, this cannot completely replace textual study and theatrical considerations. This question offered scope for comparison and opinion; some very high quality responses were seen, offering sophisticated and thoughtful points. Focus on specific speeches and incidents were a popular approach for many candidates. Some convincing and specific arguments were applied by those candidates who engaged with an argument and supported points with accurate and effective reference to the play.

Question 5(b) responses often featured comprehensive discussions and arguments with some effective consideration of the 'how far' element of the question. Less confident responses struggled with the terms of the question and a number relied too heavily on one film version of the play (as in Question 5(a)). The best responses showed detailed knowledge of the play and explored a number of areas relating to responsibility for the tragedy. This was less popular than 5(a) for candidates answering on this text.

The Importance of Being Earnest

Question 6(a) was answered well by the very few candidates who attempted it. Responses were characterized by excellent knowledge of the play, thorough and well-chosen support and purposeful analysis. Most balanced their discussion of the characters effectively with positive outcomes against mark scheme criteria.

Question 6(b) offered full scope for some excellent responses on the theme of lies and deception with the best responses using the given quotation thoughtfully to compose an argument. Some candidates focused more on the theme of lies than deception with varying results but overall a good deal of originality and detailed discussion was in evidence.

Our Town

Question 7(a) was answered by a small number of candidates. Some struggled to move beyond a narrative account of the character of Emily with evident weaknesses in knowledge about the play's structure and plot. Where analysis was attempted and the presentation of the character attempted, responses were more successful.

Question 7(b) was answered by very few candidates. Most of these focused in general terms on the theme of appreciating life.

Pride and Prejudice

Question 8(a) proved popular with candidates answering on this text. Less secure responses tended towards narrative or straightforward character study while better responses showed an ability to engage with the question and focus on the differences between the two characters at the beginning and end of the novel. Sound and thorough responses drew clear contrasts and used the text purposefully to support points made. Less confident candidates struggled to achieve a balance between discussion of Mr Darcy and Mr Bingley or relied too heavily on a narrative approach.

Question 8(b) responses focused largely on the characters of Lady Catherine and Mr Collins with varying degrees of success. All candidates clearly seemed to understand what constituted pompous behaviour but were less secure when dealing with the idea of conceit. Better responses integrated textual support effectively into their responses and developed points well.

To Kill a Mockingbird

Question 9(a) was infrequently done by candidates this series. Several candidates succeeded in engaging with the 'presented' element of the question, covering both Tom Robinson and Calpurnia equally in their arguments. Less successful responses often resorted to narrative accounts from the novel and/or offered brief responses.

Question 9(b) offered the opportunity to write about the themes of law and justice but was not answered by many candidates. Better responses dealt with both themes while less secure approaches focused largely on aspects related to law.

The English Teacher

Question 10(a) was seen very rarely in this series with some responses using a largely narrative approach to Krishna's experience of different kinds of education in the novel.

Question 10(b) was also very rarely seen. Responses to this question were well-handled and used textual reference, quotation and cultural context to develop relevant arguments about the domestic and the spiritual in the novel.

Of Mice and Men

Question 11(a) was hugely popular with candidates of all abilities and a full range of responses were seen. In stating that Curley's wife must be discussed in terms of prejudice and presenting the need for candidates to choose another character to write about, the question discriminated well for different abilities. The other character chosen most frequently was Crooks and candidates generally showed knowledge and understanding of the character of Curley's wife and her exposure to prejudice. Very confident responses dealt in detail with her own prejudice towards Crooks in the scene where she threatens to get him lynched. Some candidates were thrown off course a little by the choice of character and others wrote about all the characters in a general approach. This led to a lack of depth and detail in analysis. Along with narrative approaches this was not very successful in meeting mark scheme criteria. The best responses developed original and thoughtful interpretations in response to the question, analysing well and demonstrating excellent knowledge of the novel through reference and support.

Question 11(b) invited candidates to discuss themes in the novel that continue to engender popularity in modern readers. It was slightly less popular than 11(a). Most candidates were adept at identifying themes but levels of depth and detail in analysis varied considerably between responses. Some tended to repeat themselves or become overly concerned with the mention of 1937, laboring somewhat spurious points about social, cultural and historical context to the detriment of their arguments. Some very good responses used the opportunity to develop sophisticated personal arguments firmly rooted in analysis and interpretation of the text.

Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry

Question 12(a) Not many responses were seen on this text. Lower level responses tended to focus on Mary Logan in a brief and narrative manner. Most candidates showed understanding of the text but did not always use textual reference or quotation well.

Question 12(b) was also rarely seen this series. Those candidates who attempted this question focused on the themes with relevance and understanding. There was some attempt to separate the difference between education and learning in a couple of responses; this offered mature insight and analysis.

Nineteenth Century Short Stories

Question 13(a) There were few responses on the stories in this series. For this question on relationships between men and women most candidates chose to write about 'The Unexpected' alongside 'Tony Kytes, the Arch Deceiver'. Responses seen were largely relevant and sound in their discussion of both stories and textual support was used effectively.

Question 13(b) was very rarely seen this series but there was plenty of scope for discussion on the question of fantasy in 'The Nightingale and the Rose' and one other story from the collection.

Conclusion

In less successful answers timing presented an issue for some candidates who left themselves too little time to answer their second question. This led to a number of candidates achieving very different marks on individual parts of the paper. There is still a tendency amongst some candidates to 'false starts' – starting an essay, sometimes getting quite a long way with it and ultimately wasting time by having to start again when they realise that they do not know how to continue. Time spent choosing a question, understanding it and planning an answer is usually a judicious approach. Where film versions of a play or novel are used during teaching, it is important that candidates are aware that they represent only one of a range of possible interpretations and may not be completely true to the texts they are based on. Some answers were less successful because of over reliance on film versions of the text.

More successful answers combined secure or excellent knowledge of texts with detailed analysis, clarity and personal engagement, the most effective demonstrating sophistication and originality in their approaches to the texts. Good responses were characterized by sound, supported knowledge and understanding; some secure analysis and evidence of a personal response. At all levels of ability, understanding the demands of each question was a key factor in determining success.

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