

Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2012

International GCSE English (4EA0/02)
Paper 2

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Question 1 Reading

Question 1 was based on *Refugee Blues* from the Edexcel Anthology. Candidates were asked to explain how the writer tries to make the reader sympathise with the refugees in the poem. The question provided supportive bullet points directing candidates to address the challenges the refugees face, the reactions of the narrator, contrasts in the poem and the use of language. The question was accessible to candidates and almost all candidates made some attempt to answer it. Candidates responded well to the text and for the most part seemed to have enjoyed it. Some examiners reported seeing a greater attention to language in these responses compared to those from previous series, with candidates able to demonstrate understanding rather than just offer explanation. Answers were on the whole organised, thoughtful and clear. Many were detailed and thorough, demonstrating understanding of theme and ideas. Most candidates could explain some form of contrasts in terms of the treatment of the refugees compared to the treatment of animals and others. In almost all of the responses the candidates were aware of the predicament of the refugees and responded with sympathy and sensitivity. Some better responses were able to respond to the 'blues' and the biblical elements as well as the historical context, and make direct links between the subjugation of the negroes in America and that of the Jews in Germany. Many responses identified literary devices including repetition with the stronger answers using these to support their interpretation of the text rather than identification being an end in itself. Weaker responses were often narrative-based and did little more than retell the story of the poem. Better responses tended not to go through the text in chronological order but made a series of analytical points and then supported them with aptly chosen evidence from the passage.

Question 2

Question 2a

This question asked candidates to respond in favour or against spending large sums of public money on sporting events such as the Olympics. This was clearly a highly topical area and many candidates were clearly engaged by it. Not surprisingly, many had strong views and these were often well expressed even though the material was at times somewhat over-used and not always their own opinion. Even at the lower end of the marks there were some clear views on the subject communicated to the reader. Many made the points about the ethical and moral considerations of spending on sport instead of helping the poor and the needy, or providing better public services, particularly schools and hospitals. The best responses were those that had been taught the techniques of explanation and justification and could demonstrate these with flair so as to produce a piece of writing that was skilful in its use of language. Some candidates presented a balanced essay noting points in favour of and against spending on sporting events and these were credited equally with those that adopted a single point of view. Answers in the mid-range often communicated clearly but were held

back by a lack of variety in sentence use and in vocabulary. Weaker responses were generally lacking in clarity and were characterised by a lack of control in paragraphing and structure.

Question 2b

This question asked candidates to write a letter to a friend persuading him or her to give up their bullying ways. Of the three writing questions this was the least popular. Some examiners felt that some weaker candidates had chosen this because of the familiarity of the letter format, and perhaps it was a topic with which they could identify. This sometimes produced answers that were too close to the writers' personal experiences and as a result tended to adopt an anecdotal rather than persuasive style. In these expression was often limited and content often lacked any real depth of thought. Those who recognised the difficulty in adopting an appropriate tone that was persuasive and yet also friendly and able to admonish all at the same time, these were the more successful responses. Weaker responses were often brief and struggled to write at length without repetition and also found it difficult to find an appropriate tone and structure for this piece of writing. As ever, it is the overall shape of the writing that weaker candidates struggle with.

Question 2c

The prompt of "A new start" was extremely effective in generating a wide range of interesting responses that were influenced by an impressive range of interests and experiences. In reality most dealt with moving home or moving school. Candidates were able to effectively respond to the question using a wide variety of narrative techniques and this proved to be an effective discriminator for their differing levels of ability. Once again a small number of responses were on occasion very contrived: it looked as though a set answer had been learnt and the answer sought to manipulate this essay title to accommodate it. Centres should be aware that this is not considered good practice as it seldom allows candidates to write freely in a way that fully enables them to achieve the highest marks. One notable feature of responses to this question is that they were often able to exhibit skills in crafting sentences. Weaker answers were often very clichéd in their approach and lacking in sufficient control and range of expression to fully realise what they were trying to convey. The highest scoring answers tended to create works of genuinely compelling communicative impact where a wide range of techniques was subtly used to craft and sustain the reader's response.

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