

A LEVEL

Examiners' report

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE (EMC)

H474

For first teaching in 2015

H474/02 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 H474/02 series overview

In this second year of the examination, candidates are taking an increasingly strategic approach to hitting the assessment objectives, however, in building a recipe to use with any question set, some still risk missing the specific focus of the question and genuine engagement with the texts in the process. Lengthy introductions which deliver a large quantity of context and spend time elaborating on the areas which will be covered in the response and equally lengthy conclusions which re-affirm what has been explored continue to take up a great deal of time for little reward. Candidates are advised to make better use of their time by annotating the given poem/extract in relation to the focus of the question and making brief, effective plans, especially where connection to other poems in the collection is required. Many responses were still rather too long, with candidates determined to show all they know about the given poem and extract/play rather than judiciously selected material to shape their response to the question. Concise, analytical responses that demonstrate a genuine engagement with the ideas in the texts and the ways meanings are shaped continue to be the most successful.

Blake and Duffy are the most popular poetry collections but they did not dominate entirely with Dickinson and Rose attracting a good number of responses, along with some on Boland and Heaney. This spread across texts was not so evident in the drama, with 'A Streetcar Named Desire' and then 'Othello' being studied by the majority of candidates. There was some lively engagement with 'Jerusalem' but very few on 'Translations' or 'The Importance of Being Earnest' and virtually none on 'Our Country's Good.'

The requirements of AO1 and AO2 are linked together in the indicative content of the mark scheme and these are the dominant objectives in this paper. AO1 refers to the application of "relevant concepts and methods from integrated linguistic and literary study as appropriate" and this is the same across all components of A Level English Language and Literature. Literature candidates read literary texts using literary concepts and methods of analysis. Language candidates bring linguistic ideas such as pragmatics, discourse and phonology and approaches such as conversation and discourse analysis to their study of literary texts. However, it is important to judge which concepts and methods are most useful in relation to the text and the particular question.

In responding to the questions in this paper, candidates are often taking a more literary approach, particularly in Section A – Poetry: stylistic analysis, however in Section B – Plays: dramatic and stylistic analysis, some are exploring linguistic methods and concepts. The majority of candidates demonstrate competent or well-developed analytical skills, falling into levels 4 and 5 of the mark scheme, and the most successful candidates are able to blend this analysis into a well-structured response which demonstrates a genuine engagement with the thematic concerns of the text. However, whilst many use appropriate terminology, some do not know the basic parts of speech or identify features such as semantic/lexical fields or asyndeton without analysing the effects of these or relating their commentary to the question.

AO3 context can be approached in several ways. For poetry and drama, an understanding of how the texts fit into their social, cultural, historical and political background serves to illuminate the writer's meaning, as does a grasp of the writer's own beliefs, values and situation. Recognising how texts may be interpreted differently according to when they are read/seen is also a valid way of exploring context. In addition, an appreciation of how a specific text or writer's work fits into literary context such as tragedy or plastic theatre is also valid. In this examination series, context was still sometimes bolted on, either in the introduction or appearing rather suddenly in a separate paragraph, however the best approach saw candidates integrating their understanding naturally in the course of a relevant response, showing how context illuminated their understanding of the texts. Centres had taken note of last year's advice to steer clear of too much biographical work except where it is directly relevant to the text and question; for candidates less secure in analytical skill, this learned information can form an unhelpful crutch and barrier to the task. The mark scheme shows that context is largely to do with genre conventions or the place of the poem in a thematic collection, or the position of a scene in a play. Only the most able candidates were able to wield biographical data with purpose.

As in 2017, successful responses:

- are planned and focused – it is better to write less in a more relevant, structured and coherent way than to write a great deal which lacks a sense of direction
- integrate context in the course of the response rather than being bolted on, making it relevant to the terms of the question
- explore how language and linguistics shape meaning by identifying what the writer is saying first and then how it is said, rather than feature spotting and then trying to make it fit the question
- genuinely engage with specific effects created by literary devices, providing personal rather than learned explanations
- avoid simply repeating the terms of the question
- use linguistic methods and concepts where they are directly relevant to the question
- avoid lengthy introductions which set out what will be explored and equally lengthy conclusions which re-affirm what has been said
- keep the given poem and drama extract at the centre of the response
- balance time equally across Section A and Section B.

Section A overview

Poetry is different from Section B through the AO4 requirement to make connections. This requirement is best served by being integrated into the analysis of the poem set in the examination; the set poem should remain the focus of the response. The poems chosen to make such connections should illuminate the set poem and maintain the focus on the question rather than being loosely linked through a technique or general comment about theme. It became clear in this session that some centres are teaching connections as a straightforward requirement to compare so that candidates focused on ways in which the set poem is similar to, or different from, others in the collection and could lose their way as a consequence. Some candidates still used the requirement to make connections as an opportunity to write about poems that they would have preferred to be set, or the set poems from the 2017 series which had been used as their mock examination. In these cases, they wrote at greater length on these poems than on the one given in the paper. At the other extreme, candidates made regular but very brief references to one or more other poems throughout their answer, not being able to develop the connection. Candidates should take a few minutes to select the linked poem(s) and plan how they will fit into the response so that, in the same way as AO3 context, they are relevant rather than bolted on. Using more than two poems leads to very brief and generalised connections, losing focus on the set poem that needs to remain central to their analysis.

Question 1

1 William Blake

Explore how William Blake presents ideas about the natural world in 'The Lamb' (l) and make connections with one or two other poems from your collection.

You should consider Blake's use of poetic and stylistic techniques and significant literary or other relevant contexts.

[32]

Most candidates were able to address the question of the natural world, but the extent to which this was kept in view varied considerably with some paying lip service to the focus and others incorporating it fully into the fabric of their answers. Some responses skated the surface of the poem, selecting quotations and commenting briefly whilst others provided extensive and thought-provoking analysis. It was evident that a significant proportion of candidates would have preferred to explore 'The Echoing Green' or 'The Garden of Love' which had the potential to make effective connections or, often less successfully, 'London' (set as the core poem in 2017) and they wrote more about these linked poems. The whiteness of Tom Dacre's hair and the corruption of his innocence in 'The Chimney Sweeper' was cited as a connection to that of the lamb with this being used to link in the reference to the 'chimney- sweeper's cry' in 'London'. For many candidates, 'The Tyger' was a natural connection through the subject matter of animals and most considered the concept of creation. Some responses struggled to go beyond this and the differences in descriptions of the innocent lamb and fierce tiger. As a relatively simple poem in terms of its structure and vocabulary, some responses to 'The Lamb' were superficial rather than probing. Commentary on the form and structure tended to be rather limited with the rhyme scheme being cited as jolly or like a nursery rhyme with others, such as 'London' as rigid and controlling, however such analysis needs to be linked to the meaning rather than as an obligatory opening paragraph.

Candidates were all able to say something about the context, the most successful as ever using it to inform their grasp of the poems rather than simply stating Blake's religious views. Whilst the advice regarding Blake can be applied to all the poetry, examiners reported that with this text it was more apparent that candidates need regular practice with writing independent essays under timed conditions rather than learning context and notes about the poems and then bolting it together. With so many resources available for Blake, there is a danger that candidates rely on these rather than independently engaging with the text and the given question.

Question 2

2 Emily Dickinson

Explore how Emily Dickinson presents ideas and feelings about religious faith in 'This World is not Conclusion' and make connections with one or two other poems from your collection.

You should consider Dickinson's use of poetic and stylistic techniques and significant literary or other relevant contexts.

[32]

This was a relatively popular question, generally being answered by candidates working at level 4 and above in the mark scheme. The strength of these responses was evident in the immediate engagement with the poems, not needing the lengthy opening paragraph and repetition in the conclusion. Instead they were able to conclude by looking at the end of the poem and the power of Dickinson's message, providing some thoughtful analysis on the narcotics metaphor. Answers at the higher end of the range provided thoughtful and often sophisticated arguments informed by literary and linguistic insight not only into the language but the form and structure. These answers made good use of contextual features linked purposefully to Dickinson's background. Poems chosen for connections included 'I heard a fly buzz,' 'Going to Heaven' and 'Because I could not stop for Death'. It was evident that the majority of candidates really enjoyed the debate at the heart of Dickinson's work and were able to explore how the form and structure shaped meaning.

Candidates working at level 3 and below struggled to get to grips with the poem's meaning and the question of religious faith. A good number of these lower level essays made rather too much of Dickinson's use of capitalisation with little reference to other techniques.

Question 3

3 Seamus Heaney

Explore how Seamus Heaney presents thoughts and feelings about sacrifice and violence in 'The Tollund Man' and make connections with one or two other poems from your collection.

You should consider Heaney's use of poetic and stylistic techniques and significant literary or other relevant contexts.

[32]

Candidates engaged well with 'The Tollund Man' and the question, particularly with regard to the direct focus on the concepts of sacrifice and violence which enabled candidates to interweave relevant context. Higher level answers reflected on the poem's structure and context, interlinking the two to form arguments related to feelings about sacrifice and violence. Many referred to the visceral imagery of the 'dark juices' and the 'mild pods of his eyelids' with some effective use of terminology. Analysis of the lexis and imagery was generally stronger than the form and structure, with some exploration of the impact of enjambment and the short lines/clauses. Most responses were able to relate the poem's concerns to the Irish struggles endured and variable use was made of these as contextual detail. Commonly used linked poems included 'Strange Fruit', 'Punishment' and 'Funeral Rites' and there was often a better balance across the texts than with the other collections of poetry.

Question 4

4 Eavan Boland

Explore how Eavan Boland presents ideas about the rituals of the working day in 'From the Irish of Pangur Ban' and make connections with one or two other poems from your collection.

You should consider Boland's use of poetic and stylistic techniques and significant literary or other relevant contexts.

[32]

There were relatively few responses to this collection of poetry. Whilst there was a generally secure grasp of the set poem, some candidates struggled to respond directly to the phrasing of the question, possibly not seeing the speaker's search for knowledge and enlightenment as a ritual of the working day, but some were able to demonstrate competent analysis of the poem. The majority of responses understood the central image of the poem, with Pangur's hunt for mice mirroring the monk's search for knowledge, but this was often undeveloped and there was evidence of some candidates mechanically working their way through each line of the poem, explaining its meaning rather than the way literary and linguistic devices shaped such meaning. Linked poems used included: 'Degas's Laundresses' and 'Woman in Kitchen' where the sense of satisfaction in the ritual of study was contrasted with tendency of artists to romanticise women in clichéd ways and the perceived drudgery they undergo. The male (monk) versus female experience was sometimes considered with relatively few candidates being aware that the set poem is a reworking of an ancient Irish poem.

Question 5

5 Carol Ann Duffy

Explore how Carol Ann Duffy presents the physical and emotional distance between lovers in 'Ithaca' and make connections with one or two other poems from your collection.

You should consider Duffy's use of poetic and stylistic techniques and significant literary or other relevant contexts.

[32]

Candidates were confident in responding to the idea of physical and emotional distance in 'Ithaca', using pertinent personal arguments to explore the sense of loss in the poem. Whilst some candidates would have preferred other poems and wrote more on these, there were many lucid and well-organised interpretations presented and developed. Some responses spent too long in the early stages of 'Ithaca', exploring it on a line by line basis and therefore never made it to the ending and the conclusion of the myth. This set poem seemed to encourage a wider range of connecting poems than the other collections in Section A, with 'Rapture' 'Hour', 'You' and 'Over' being popular choices. Where linked poems were used well, candidates used detail to further develop and enhance literary and linguistic arguments linked to the question. Some responses used rather too many and moved between the set and linked poems in a seemingly random way rather than constructing a careful line of argument. Some candidates struggled to find anything to say about the context of the poems, apart from their position within a collection tracing the development and ending of a love affair, with some not mentioning that of Homer's Odyssey.

Question 6

6 Jacob Sam-La Rose

Explore how Jacob Sam-La Rose presents the experience of searching for answers in 'Magnitude' and make connections with one or two other poems from your collection.

You should consider Sam-La Rose's use of poetic and stylistic techniques and significant literary or other relevant contexts.

[32]

Most responses to this collection kept the question closely in view and ranged across the set poem, 'Magnitude', selecting detail purposefully to compose perceptive and analytical essays. Examiners reported a genuine engagement of many candidates with this poem and others chosen for connection. A number referred to insight received from Rose visiting their school and the relative lack of written revision resources for this text appeared to encourage more independent thinking about the collection. Less successful answers struggled with the question of searching for answers and lacked confidence in their discussion of abstract concepts, limiting their exploration of the text and its context to slavery. There were a few that only responded to the first half of the poem (I) and either did not have time for II or did not see it on the paper. This limited the scope of their analysis and the opportunities to explore the thematic connection across the text. Very occasionally, candidates used the second part of the poem as the connecting text. In terms of the context, it was surprising to see that many did not refer to the epigram at the start of the poem. Commonly used linked poems included one of the 'Speechless' series, often 'Speechless IV' and 'Song for a Spent 100w bulb'.

Section B overview

Some candidates appeared to employ the same approach taken with the AO4 connections requirement in Section A to the AO3 contextual requirement in Section B: explore the significance of the extract within the play. Rather than spending time analysing scenes or moments from other parts of the play, a relatively brief and precise paragraph, to establish where the given extract fits in the play (characters, actions, themes) and how it moves things along, points to climax, or refers back in some way is sufficient. A brief quotation from another part of the play, is fine, but potted or more detailed analyses of other scenes or episodes are not needed, and draw responses away from what earns the greatest reward: analysis of the given extract.

7 William Shakespeare: *Othello*

Explore how Shakespeare presents the build-up to the murder of Desdemona in this extract from *Othello*.

You should consider the use of dramatic and stylistic techniques in the extract, its significance within the play and any relevant dramatic or other contexts.

[32]

Question 7

The most successful responses really focused on the question of how Shakespeare builds up to the murder of Desdemona, having studied it as drama and had the opportunity to watch productions. Candidates working at levels 5 and 6 in the mark scheme tended to be very assured with their use of dramatic terminology and confidently referred to linguistic and literary concepts such as Grice's Maxims, adjacency pairs and the use of exclamatives, imperatives and declaratives. The nature of tragedy also featured as a point of context. There was some highly effective analysis of the imagery used by Othello and the structure of his monologue, many candidates comparing this with the nobility and dignity of his language earlier in the play. Higher ability responses explored the pathos and dramatic irony of Othello and Desdemona's inability to communicate with each other to avoid the tragedy of her death, or as Othello says before the scene, "The pity of it, the pity of it, Iago." The majority of responses were more effective this year in relating this scene to the tragic context of the play and the fatal influence of Iago on Othello and Desdemona's relationship.

Less successful responses tended to track the scene with the least effective resorting to paraphrase and these often said very little about the exchange between Othello and Desdemona. By explaining what Othello says and its meaning, they lost sight of it as a drama to be performed. Some referred back to last year's question and wrote more about Iago than about the given scene this year.

Question 8

8 Oscar Wilde: *The Importance of Being Earnest*

Explore how Wilde presents the discovery of 'the hand-bag' in this extract from *The Importance of Being Earnest*.

You should consider the use of dramatic and stylistic techniques in the extract, its significance within the play and any relevant dramatic or other contexts.

[32]

The majority of responses only just reached level 4 competence in adopting a rather piecemeal approach to the text and question. Some were able to deal with dramatic techniques such as the use of stage directions. There were some effective explorations of the humour of Miss Prism's narrative which reveals the ridiculous nature of her concerns about the handbag, however there was surprisingly less focus on the involvement of Jack and Chasuble. More successful answers were able to place the scene firmly in the wider context of the play and build structured arguments with effective illustration of techniques.

It appeared that very few candidates had considered the dramatic impact of the ending of the play and the staging. Having set the extract on the interaction of Gwendolen and Cecily in 2017, candidates were often keen to write about the female characters and therefore often focused on the characterisation of Lady B and Gwendolen, explaining in detail the context in terms of Victorian conventions and Wilde challenging attitudes about social class.

Question 9

9 Tennessee Williams: *A Streetcar Named Desire*

Explore how Williams presents Stella and Stanley's relationship in this extract from *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

You should consider the use of dramatic and stylistic techniques in the extract, its significance within the play and any relevant dramatic or other contexts.

[32]

Candidates engaged confidently with the characters of Stella and Stanley, really focusing on their relationship in this particular scene. The best responses offered detailed and selective analysis of the extract and applied relevant concepts with sophistication and assurance. Less successful responses tended to track the scene and some struggled to use appropriate terminology. In terms of context, there was much discussion of the society of 1950s America with a usually helpful focus on patriarchy and links to the 'Napoleonic code' referenced by Stanley early in the piece. The exploration of context was at its best where it was directly connected to the literary and linguistic devices and the nature of the drama, with apt references to other moments in the play such as the poker scene, the rape of Blanche and Stanley throwing the meat to Stella. Most grasped the way the relationship is directly affected by the arrival of Blanche and the way this affects Stella's loyalties, seeing the control by Stanley here as foreshadowing the end of the play. In some responses, there was less focus on the given scene and, in some cases, candidates were side-tracked by Blanche and clearly took any opportunity to write about her relationship with Stanley.

It was interesting to see the variety of interpretations of Stella; some candidates believed her to be feisty and used the white gloves at the end of the extract as a signal that she was not prepared to give in to Stanley but was aligning herself with Blanche and challenging him. Some responses also explored Stanley's insecurities and considered how the awareness of Blanche's presence throughout the scene impact on both Stella and Stanley.

Question 10

10 Brian Friel: *Translations*

Explore how Friel presents the communication between Maire and Yolland in this extract from *Translations*.

You should consider the use of dramatic and stylistic techniques in the extract, its significance within the play and any relevant dramatic or other contexts.

[32]

There were very few responses to this text, with most grasping the historical context and the impact this has on the relationship between Maire and Yolland. Most had some understanding of the ways in which they use Latin as well as paralinguistic features in order to communicate and appreciated the humour of Maire's concerns about the meaning of her one old-fashioned English phrase. There was some grasp of the symbolic significance of naming places and elements. Relating this scene to the wider context of the play's exploration of alienation and conflict would have enabled candidates to show how the literary and linguistic devices shape meaning at levels 5 and 6 of the mark scheme.

Question 11

11 Timberlake Wertenbaker: *Our Country's Good*

Explore how Wertenbaker presents the discussion about punishment of the convicts in this extract from *Our Country's Good*.

You should consider the use of dramatic and stylistic techniques in the extract, its significance within the play and any relevant dramatic or other contexts.

[32]

Not enough centres opted for this text option for meaningful comments on performance to be made.

Question 12

12 Jez Butterworth: *Jerusalem*

Explore how Butterworth presents Johnny's storytelling in this extract from *Jerusalem*.

You should consider the use of dramatic and stylistic techniques in the extract, its significance within the play and any relevant dramatic or other contexts.

[32]

The responses to 'Jerusalem' elicited some lively engagement with the text, the majority being at level 4 and above. The most successful used concepts and terminology to frame specific and academic arguments with a real grasp of the nature of story-telling. Context was handled most effectively when the story-telling in the extract was compared with other examples in the play and related to Johnny's mythical status. Candidates demonstrated that they knew and enjoyed the play, engaging with its humour and – at times – pathos. The idea that "everyone knows a Johnny" and can relate to the need to impress underpinned their responses. They were therefore confident in exploring the literary and linguistic devices Johnny uses to tell his stories and the reactions by the other characters. A few less successful responses merely paraphrased the scene with some residual commentary or simply retold Johnny's stories. To make the most of this question, candidates had to be very aware of structure and those working confidently at levels 5 and 6 were able to do so.

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