

**GCSE (9–1)**

**Examiners' report**

# **ENGLISH LANGUAGE**

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**J351**

For first teaching in 2015

**J351/02 November 2022 series**

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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. A selection of candidate responses is also provided. 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 and the mark scheme can be downloaded from OCR.

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## Paper 2 series overview

J351/02 is one of two examined components for the GCSE (9-1) English Language examinations. Each of the components follows a similar structure and tests the same Assessment Objectives although J351/02 assesses candidates' responses to fiction texts whereas J351/01 assesses their responses to non-fiction texts. The other difference is that in Question 2 of J351/01 candidates must locate and synthesise information from the two texts. In J351/02 Question 2 tests AO2: analysis of language and structure.

Candidates should prepare for this examination by practising how to read unseen literary texts with confidence, understanding and, eventually, insight. They should learn how to select and interpret relevant details from the text and identify and explain features of language and structure. They must be able to recognise, identify and compare similarities and contrasts between texts and evaluate their effect and impact on the reader. In all this careful, measured appreciation of what exactly the question is asking is critical in developing a relevant answer.

We were back in this session to something that more closely resembled the sessions in November 2019 and previously. That is to say that most of the candidates were looking to improve on the grades they had been given in June. As always, there were some candidates who surprised and delighted with the very high standard of their work.

In this session candidates' work showed different levels of understanding of the demands of each question and the AO(s) it is testing. In common with previous sittings all candidates were confident in dealing with the retrieval and inference tested in Question 1. Typical of all sittings there was a wider range of outcomes on Questions 2 and 3 which test analysis of language and structure. Almost all candidates managed to say something of relevance and interest which is testament to the efforts of both teachers and candidates in a very short space of preparation time. Many candidates appeared to find reading Questions 2, 3, and 4 challenging and perhaps didn't feel as confident with the unseen passages. The strongest candidates, however, did superbly when faced with such material and scored very high marks on all of the questions.

This component of the series worked well in terms of differentiation, even though the preponderance of candidates were bunched within a 20-mark range. Candidates working in the range of Levels 1-3 found the second reading passage more challenging than the first and found Question 3 more difficult than Question 2 as a result. Candidates continued to demonstrate confidence with Question 4 and again, it was plain that the teaching of these AOs had been very successful.

We enjoyed reading some entertaining, sometimes heart-felt and original essays in Section B.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally did the following:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally did the following:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>organised their time economically and efficiently so as to read each passage thoughtfully and in detail.</li> </ul> <p>In Questions 2 and 3:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>located and noted key language and structure points</li> <li>planned each answer before starting to write</li> <li>located the lines specified in each task to avoid irrelevance and maximise outcome</li> <li>wrote about ALL of the set lines and made the response conform to the exact wording of the task.</li> </ul> <p>In Question 4:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>thoughtfully considered both the differences and similarities between the two passages</li> <li>gave wide and multiple definitions of 'enjoyable' in their responses</li> <li>used the bullet points to good effect</li> <li>recognised and acted on requirements of each AO: for example, used a series of comparative points rather than simply relying on one of them</li> <li>understood that evaluation is not opinion and has always to be supported by reference to the texts.</li> </ul> <p>In the Writing Tasks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>took time and care in planning their work ensuring that the final selection of task had been made from a short list of alternatives</li> <li>had a clear idea of the eventual overall shape and structure of the finished piece.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>did not read (or understand) both passages with sufficient thoroughness, or without making common sense deductions about their context and purpose</li> <li>did not read the passages consecutively and ignored the need to locate similarities and differences between them</li> <li>struggled to locate and differentiate language and structure in each of the texts</li> <li>went for the first writing scenario that occurred to them without spending time thinking about and planning their response</li> <li>did not finish the paper or wrote too much for responses e.g. filling up all the pages of the answer booklet</li> <li>paid little attention to the need for precise and accurate expression.</li> </ul>

## Section A overview

Text 1 was a 1949 short story by Sylvia Plath. The use of simile and metaphor, ambiguous tone and the dramatic contrasts between the (evidently very young) children and the permanence of the topographical features allowed candidates to device spot and express opinions, but often without really coming to terms with the impact and effects of the passage. It is a story about children written for an adult audience. The reference to 'figureheads' was almost universally unrecognised as was the transference of the children's feelings to the inanimate features of the landscape. And in Question 4, much hangs on the sentence 'David and Susan were giants in a world of minute miracles' but it was rarely broached. The best passage to compare this with is the passage from Margaret Atwood's 'Cats Eye' set in 2020, which was essentially about the relationship between the children and their parents, rather than, as here, the children and abstract features of the beach.

Text 2, Dylan Thomas's 'Holiday Memories', published in 1946, created a significantly greater challenge for many candidates. There was some glossing of this passage, but it proved that more was needed. The central point: the cheap glamour and thrill of the beach/fair set against the tawdry quotidian reality of the 'threadbare playground, the waste lot and the pickle factory' for these folk was again, an adult idea. But almost all candidates took it on, and the difficulties could be resolved with careful reading.

The quality of some candidates' work was slightly depressed compared with the standard of previous sessions. Examiners always mark fairly but despite this, many marks for Questions 2, 3, and 4 were at Level 1 or 2. This is reflected in the comparisons for many candidates between performance on reading and writing was more disparate than previously.

Most candidates responded strongly and correctly to the interpretation of the passage's concerns with the children's extreme youth and consequently powerful inner life. The key area to focus on is identifying and quantifying the impact and effects of the writing in the context of the way it is expressed.

### Question 1 (a)

Question 1 is about **Text 1**, *The Green Rock* by Sylvia Plath.

**1** Look again at lines 1–11.

**(a)** Identify **one** word or phrase **from these lines** that show that Susan is happy.

.....  
 ..... **[1]**

'Susan giggled' or was 'triumphant' or thought it was a delightful idea. A few candidates wrongly thought 'she gazed across the stony beach' was a sign of her happiness but the stony nature of the beach does not evoke happiness. Some candidates made the correct identification by enclosing it within overlong quotations. Others tended to pick quotations from outside the clearly set lines.

## Question 1 (b)

(b) Explain **two** things that made the walking difficult.

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

Candidates had numerous options to answer this question but some candidates were not precise enough with their responses. Simple references to 'mud' or 'water' did not gain a mark. The question requires the nature of the selection that indicates why it makes walking difficult.

## Question 1 (c)

(c) Give **one** detail which shows that David was less confident than Susan.

.....  
..... [1]

There were three possible responses to this question and most candidates identified one of them. The most popular response was 'He walked gingerly', followed by 'David followed her'. Again, it was important that candidates showed precision in their choices by ensuring they did not provide overly long quotations. Responses such as 'David grabbed her outstretched hand' were not rewarded because they were taken from outside the question's line parameters.

## Question 2

Question 2 is about **Text 1**, *The Green Rock* by Sylvia Plath.

**2** Look again at lines 12–22.

How does Sylvia Plath use language and structure to present the rock and its importance for the children's games?

You should use relevant subject terminology to support your answer.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

..... **[6]**

Many candidates used subject terminology when responding to this question. The most popular language features identified were similes and personification. Better responses not only accurately identified the features but commented on the effects in terms of importance for children's games. The permanence of the rock was often identified through it being 'deeply embedded in the sand', and many candidates commented on its 'friendly' nature to the children conveyed either through the simile 'like some docile animal' or the simile 'like the shell of some giant turtle'. A number of responses explained the important link between the rock and its different imagined roles within the games. Weaker responses were merely descriptive of selected quotations or indeed the whole extract itself.

References to structure were mainly conveyed by the common short/long sentences and some attempt to explain effects but there were few responses which looked at the effect of Susan's short command 'Come on!' or the repetition of 'sometimes' in relation to the rock's imagined role. The best responses saw the comparisons which form its basis and development: stillness v motion; silence v loud noise, etc.

### Assessment for learning



Candidates still need to look harder at the overall structure and shape of the piece before going on to drill down into the individual language details that it contains.



## Exemplar 1

2.

Susan uses direct speech in 'Come on!' and she 'shouted above the roar of the tide'. She uses an imperative verb and an exclamation to command David, showing the importance of the children getting to the rock. She shouts so loudly that it is above the sound of the tide. The noun 'roar' implies the tide's aggressiveness and the raucous sound created. A simile is used to describe the children as 'like two sturdy figureheads' to present their resolute stance on the rock, and it implies that they are purposeful rather than merely two children playing games, also implying the importance of the rock for these games. The use of the adjective 'motionless' that is imbedded in the sentence with a pause almost slows down time and reflects how the children are standing still and waiting. An entire paragraph is used to describe the rock in great detail and uses two connected similes, 'like the shell of some giant turtle' and 'like some docile animal, lost in sleep'. This portrays the rock as something alive rather than an inanimate object and reflects the fanciful imagination of the children and emphasises its importance. It creates a placid and serene atmosphere through the use of the adjective 'docile' and the metaphor 'lost in sleep'. The rock is then directly contrasted to the 'slimy, black stones' and is 'above' them, indicating the importance of the rock and its superiority over the other rocks.

The response demonstrates skilled analysis in its appreciation of the effects of the writer's choices of language and structural features. It is very effectively integrated and developed. Examples of the antitheses that are the basis and heart of the writing are skilfully and intelligently compared: silence and loud noises; rapid motion and complete stillness, etc. The stress on the extreme youth of the children and their consequently vivid imaginations is perceptively seen and responded to.

## Question 3

Question 3 is about **Text 2**, *Holiday Memory* by Dylan Thomas.

**3** Look again at lines 1–18.

Explore how the writer uses language and structure to describe the narrator's August Bank Holiday memories.

Support your ideas by referring to the text, using relevant subject terminology.

**[12]**

It was clear that generally candidates found Text 2 more challenging than Text 1. Not only, it would appear, was this because of the language employed by Dylan Thomas, but also the context of the holiday memory, given that it described a visit around a hundred years ago. Notwithstanding this contextual difficulty, better responses focused on the details of the holiday memory through individual language and structural features. References to the repetition of 'I remember' conveying the intricate details of fun and noise of the beach and its fairground were common, as were the use of the collective noun non-sentences of paragraph one. Some of these images were explained quite clearly such as the bathers squealing and treading warily into the cold and quite possibly deep sea. There was also some reference to the man enjoying himself on the fairground ride, and the children capering all day by the sea. Some candidates identified negative aspects of the text such as the state of the caged lion, and sandfleas on the picnic lettuce. Where confusion did arise, it was usually in relation to the boy and the lion, and the reference to the little girl with the shell. One or two responses mistakenly wrote about August Bank being a person, as well as attributing the voracious appetite of the boy to the lion. But there were few candidates who simply ignored this paragraph and did not try to make something of it.

The contrast between the excitement and fun of the beach and the fair, which was very fleeting and transient, compared to the tawdry quotidian reality of threadbare playground and pickle factory was too challenging for some candidates.

Some candidates very politely expressed their frustrations that they could really extract very little from the passage. The language is very rich but it was the cultural context and setting which confused many of them.

## Exemplar 2

Thomas starts the extract with a list of short descriptive phrases, helping to set the scene of the holiday. He uses onomatopoeic words such as "tune" ~~at~~, "slap of sea" and "tickle ~~of~~ of sand". Not only does this engage the <sup>auditory & touch</sup> ~~hear~~ sense of the reader but also personifies aspects of the setting - sand can't "tickle" yet ~~at~~ when describes as such it creates a link between "sand" and a familiar sensation of tickling. This imagery creates a clear picture of the chaos of the seaside as the multitude of short phrases all pile on top of each other with no connective phrases making it seem chaotic & disjointed. Paired with the list quality of the first paragraph makes the features of the holiday seem never ending. So the use of lists of short phrases of im sensory language creates a chaotic and tangible image.

Thomas also repeats the phrase "I remember" at the beginning of paragraph 2, 3 & 4. This repetition emphasises that these are memories; this is also shown in the nature of paragraph length. As the "I remember" paragraphs progress

they get longer & more descriptive, mimicking how memories do the same as you dwell on them more. The fact that they <sup>are</sup> memories is also clarified by the unrealistic, hyperbolic nature of some of the following phrases, such as "Sharing... with a lion". This is impossible as lions are dangerous hence the matter-of-fact tone that juxtaposes the meaning of the phrases replicates the nature of memories: even crazy ~~dead~~ things can seem like "remembered" facts.

Thomas uses metaphors & simile to show that the memories are that of a child. He says the "sea [told] lies" personifying the "sea". This creates a childish tone as we know the "sea" can't speak but the metaphor is so certain that it must belong to a child, as children believe such things. This is also seen in the simile to describe <sup>the</sup> ~~the~~ "boy and lion". The fictional lion is described as "nibbling like a mouse" while the boy is "wild as a sea snake, ferocious as a heartthrob". The two similes are oxymorons as lions are usually the ferocious ones. This contrast between the similes and reality creates an unrealistic & atmosphere & childlike mood supporting the fact that these are a child's memories.

Lastly, Thomas uses alliteration in paragraph 5 \*

3 to make the memory seem whimsical. He describes the "organ" that "wheezed its waltzes" and the "dogems dogdGingJ". The use of alliteration makes the act of reading it fun as the words sound silly. This creates the sense that the memory itself is enjoyable and funny: as

This is a skilled analysis. It demonstrates a very polished application and analysis in its consideration of the effects of the writer's choices and deployment of language and structural features to influence the reader. The opening sense of chaos on the beach is very effectively explored (notwithstanding the missing of the collectives): the attempt to deal with the 'boy and the lion' is highly original and intelligent. Finally, the essential whimsicality of the piece is explored.

## Question 4

Question 4 is about **Text 1**, *The Green Rock*, and **Text 2**, *Holiday Memory*.

**4** 'Both texts powerfully present a day by the sea as enjoyable.'

How far do you agree with this statement?

In your answer you should:

- discuss the events and activities which make each day enjoyable
- explain how far the days by the sea are enjoyable
- compare the ways the writers present those days as enjoyable.

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

**[18]**

Generally, this question was answered more successfully than either Question 2 or Question 3. Candidates had obviously been well prepared for both comparison and evaluation of the two texts in terms of the given statement. Better responses compared the texts point by point rather than as two separate texts. Comparisons were made about the similarities of the two texts such as in terms of location and weather and enjoyment. Overall, many candidates thought that the imaginative play of the children was more enjoyable because of its simplicity and the comforting nature of the rock. Whereas it was thought that the holiday memory was noisier and more chaotic and had some negative features such as sunburn, the poor hungry boy/lion, and the angry mothers scolding their children about the jellyfish. Better responses drew comparisons between the direct speech of both texts to capture the sense of enjoyment as well as the end of each day with the sun setting and the pleasure finishing.

The differences between the effects of the first-person narrative and third-person narrative were touched on by a few candidates with the former giving rise to the self-contained enjoyment of the two young children as opposed to the raucous enjoyment of the probably older children, and adults, at the fairground by the sea. Stronger comparisons from Text 2 had worked their way to the end and made useful comparisons between the two passages' accounts of the setting sun/closing day.

Many candidates wrote significantly more on Plath than on Thomas and you could see why that was. There was often some description of Text 2 weighted against a more evaluative approach to Text 1.

### Misconception



Lifting phrases from the mark scheme level descriptors and shoehorning them into lifts from the text is not helpful. It is still evident that, notwithstanding challenges, candidates do better on Question 4 because they have had a second look at the passages which might well have benefited their work on Questions 2 and 3.

## Section B overview

Both writing questions were covered evenly and provided opportunities for lively writing. The more engaging responses tended to be in Question 6, where it appeared that candidates could write from personal experience in a convincing way. We commended attempts to deploy ambitious choices of vocabulary very highly. The majority of candidates were capable of using sentences and paragraphs to some, and most to good, effect. Not doing so led what might otherwise have been quite effective work to be constrained in its impact.

### Assessment for learning



The perennial emphasis on planning work carefully and realistically, sacrificing quantity for quality and writing about what you understand still holds good.

## Question 5\*

### 5\* *By the Sea*

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 their experience.

[40]

There were some interesting and imaginative responses to this title generally. Some candidates drew on material suggested by the two reading texts, especially Text 1. Others wrote about a more personal experience although such visits were usually covered in Question 6 responses. More successful responses often conveyed an air of mystery related to the context of the sea and its proposed threat, not only in the water, but to those people on land, such as tsunamis and so on. It was pleasing to note that many candidates created well-managed overall stories with appropriate registers and language variation to achieve effect via repetition and sentence variation.

## Question 6\*

**6\*** Write about a memory of an enjoyable day for you.

You should write about:

- things, people or places connected with the day
- how the day proved to be enjoyable
- the way you feel about that day now.

**[40]**

Write the number of the question you have chosen to answer.

Responses to this topic covered a range of enjoyable days out (and in) and some touching features of excursions with close family, some of whom are sadly, no longer alive. As noted above, these trips were often made to the seaside, and the activities clearly described through references to swimming, eating fish and chips, and enjoying the arcades and fair ground rides. One common denominator of trips such as these, was the impatient children constantly asking if they had arrived yet; and the exhausted, sleeping children on the return journey back home. A more than usually large number of candidates wrote about day trips in foreign countries: some exotic and some much less so.

## Exemplar 3

6.

I remember feeling that unmistakable presence of every soul around me, as I stepped delicately through tangled bramble and bracken. The whispers of quiet, silent thoughts flitted around my like little, amiable ghosts. Some chatted about me, curious and caring, whereas others were filled with resentment, pregnant with an air of pompous indignation.

'Why is she here, again?', they complained, twirling their leaves with annoyance and preening in the light.

After carefully placing my toes into the soil to not disturb the tiny tendril of a green arm or leg of a plant, I looked up through my lank locks to see thousands of red, ruddy, and flushed faces staring back at me. I had been in crowds before, of thousands of raucous people, of pushing and shoving bodies, of strident voices, but I had never felt a presence as imposing as this. Yet these were still, motionless, anchored into the moist soil they stood in with ancient roots that resided there for



centuries.

They stared at me with large eyes, enshrouded by delicate antennae, eyelashes speckled with sweet spots of pollen. They had beautiful manes of petals, a crimson-red that emanated a fervent heat of passion. Some had shy eyes, only partially exposed by their petals, still budding and learning to see. Some had large, baleful eyes, their petals on end with a threatening presence, and these loomed over the rest, illuminated by the sunlight that trickled with trepidation onto their rearing heads. Beneath them, under their canopy of verdant leaves, grew small infant flowers, their little heads peeking out at me over the protective arms of their parents. And, without realising, I felt a smile like a crescent moon that stretched across my face. Some flowers danced in response with the help of the jolly wind. Others stood adamantly and were unimpressed by me, someone so inferior in beauty and extravagance, with their lank black hair and dirt-stained white dress.

Still, despite these ambivalent opinions, I tip-toed through dirt, as careful as always, and gazed, with a dumbfounded look upon my face, at the canopy of leaves, bushes, and branches that stretched above me. These tenacious arms shielded the green kingdom below from the blight of the sun. Light, nevertheless, managed to spill onto the earth before me, a light that was laden with an ethereal glimmer; it was lost from the heavens, it seemed. It gently touched the lichen that swathed the earth below, which was now sparkling with the remnants of a previous rainfall. I could see the tiny cousins of those red-faced plants now, which had built their little empire from the fragments of light that was spared to them and the water that dribbled onto them. With this paucity of resources, they grew an army of a fathomless extent, spreading out as far as I could see.

Trying as much as I could to be unnoticed by this crowd, I hurried through the green archway, making my way to the horizon, the opening that was a smiling ball of yellow, refulgent light that was waiting to wish me goodnight. I look back on it now, and I realise the presence of these enigmatic individuals made me shy. I was somewhat humbled by their elegance and their beauty. I felt like a fly buzzing around the faces of preening ladies or like an ant scurrying around a fancy, black leather boot. But that feeling of humbleness has kindled in me a profound reverence of nature. I now am I frequented visitor of the imposing city of plants. I return each time and observe the perennial growth of the infants, the blooming and blossoming of the children, and the passing of sunken-cheeked and drooping-leaved plants that have watched over the kingdom for centuries, like me.

This work is of the highest order. There is a polished positioning of the reader who is immediately immersed in the situation and the supporting narrative line is sustained and modulated with great sensitivity and effect. Tone and register enhance the effects of the piece and the coherent overall structure is skilfully contrived. Paragraphs and grammatical features are apt, well-chosen and enhancing. The vocabulary is exceptionally rich and dense: and always appropriate. The syntactical arrangements make the work even richer than it might otherwise have been.

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