

A LEVEL

Examiners' report

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE (EMC)

H474

For first teaching in 2015

H474/03 Summer 2024 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 answers 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 3 series overview

As the title of Paper 3, 'Reading as a writer, writing as a reader,' suggests, the two tasks that candidates undertake in this examination are designed to be complementary. Candidates demonstrate their understanding of narrative construction through answering a question on their studied novel in Section A (Question 1 or Question 2) and then through the creative task of producing a story opening for Section B, Question 3 (a). Question 3 (b) asks candidates to reflect on their choices of language and structure in their own writing and evaluate the effects achieved. Question 3 (b) functions as something of a bridge between Sections A and B. Candidates are required to demonstrate a variety of skills in this examination: analytical, creative, reflective, and evaluative - and in many cases, they rise impressively to this challenge.

In Section A candidates explore the novel they have studied in relation to an aspect of narrative identified in Question 1 or 2. In this year's examination, the choices were the writer's use of structure or the contribution of direct speech to the narrative. Question 1 proved to be the more popular question, but a number of candidates successfully tackled Question 2, and both questions were accessible. The strongest work ranged across the text, exploring how structural devices or direct speech were used and the effects created; less strong responses were narrower and more limited in scope, perhaps focusing on one structural element (e.g. time shifts) or one way in which direct speech was used (e.g. as a signifier of social class).

Section A is assessed against AO1, AO2, and AO3. The strongest work creates sustained links between AO1 and AO2, with the application of an analytical concept and method followed by a well-developed analysis of the meanings created. The strongest AO3 achievement is seen when candidates not only identify relevant contextual factors but also explore their impact on reader responses to the novel. Of the novels studied for Section A, *The Great Gatsby* remains by far the most popular choice, followed by *Things Fall Apart* and *Jane Eyre*. There were fewer responses to *Atonement* in this session, but those candidates who wrote about the novel found plenty to explore for both Question 1 and Question 2. There were very few responses to *The Namesake* and *The God of Small Things*.

Section B work was, at its best, very impressive, with candidates demonstrating creativity, flair, and a keen understanding of what constitutes the opening of a narrative. The strongest Question 3 (a) responses never fail to impress examiners, especially given the challenges of writing creatively to a set of storyline prompts in exam conditions. This year, there was a sense that candidates had a more secure understanding of the generic aspects of Question 3 (a); they were producing the opening of a narrative and skilfully employing effects to draw the reader in and set the narrative in motion. The strongest work not only weaves in the storyline prompts but is faithful to the narrative arc implied by them.

Candidates who did well on Section A of this paper	Candidates who did less well on Section A of this paper
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> planned and prepared by selecting both the question topic and relevant parts of the novel for exemplification regularly signposted their response's relevance to the question drew examples widely from across the novel used quotations judiciously, considering the open-book nature of the examination used textual references to drive points rather than merely illustrate them established direct links between methods (AO1) and meanings (AO2) integrated consideration of relevant contexts of production and reception (AO3) wrote clearly and concisely in response to the question. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> did not sufficiently tailor learned material to the specific question asked responded indirectly to the question and included tangential material drew examples narrowly from specific parts of the text used textual references or quotations in an unfocused manner 'feature-spotted' language devices that were not connected directly to their effects mentioned, but struggled to integrate, historical, social, or biographical information into their responses wrote in a manner that lacked clarity and control and often at unnecessary length.

Candidates who did well on Section B of this paper	Candidates who did less well on Section B of this paper
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> showed a keen awareness of reader expectations of story openings planned effectively to engage with the storyline prompts in both their detail and implication developed openings that were subtle and understated wrote in a manner that appealed to a broad audience demonstrated a strong understanding of literary techniques and conventions provided a detailed, discriminating, and reflective commentary on their achievements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> did not adhere sufficiently to generic conventions of story openings used the storyline prompts in a way that was too indirect or deviated significantly from their implied narrative arc over-relied on tropes from horror, thriller, or fantasy genres wrote in a manner likely to appeal only to fans of specific genres without considering broader reader sensibilities drew inspiration too heavily from other media such as film or TV drama wrote a commentary that was a brief listing of some features that had been utilised with little sense of evaluation.

Section A overview

While a full range of achievement was evidenced across the cohort in this session, several examiners were happy to report an overall improvement in how candidates tackled the Section A questions. Strong levels of knowledge and understanding of the novels studied were widely evident, as was the good application of this knowledge to the aspect of narrative focused on in the question. Candidates seem to be getting more confident in using the text in the exam room, with some impressive selections of apposite detail for the question.

There was a wide range of opportunities offered by both questions, and candidates did not struggle to find enough relevant material to discuss from their studied novels. Question 1 was very popular, with candidates exploring a wide range of structural devices, including narrative perspective and time shifts, character development and foreshadowing, temporal and spatial shifts, parallel plotlines and themes, physical and symbolic settings, symbolic uses of the climate/weather, and notions of tragedy as a structural device.

Question 2 saw candidates exploring how the use of direct speech in their studied novel could be used to convey character and distinguish between characters, reflect social, cultural, and generational differences, reveal inner conflicts and motivations, create verisimilitude, advance the plot, reflect or transgress social norms, and reflect cultural and historic contexts. But some candidates struggled to maintain focus on direct speech, and instead wrote about narrative perspective. Stronger responses differentiated between idiolects in their chosen novel and related these to class, gender, background, aspiration – and ultimately to meaning in the novel.

Both questions saw candidates exploring their chosen aspect of narrative in detail and constructing convincing and cohesive arguments (AO1). The strongest work was characterised by methods and terminology drawn from both linguistic and literary approaches to analyse meanings (AO1/AO2).

There appears to be a genuine improvement year-on-year in the candidates' use of relevant contextual material to inform interpretations, with much purposeful consideration of genre contexts such as post-colonial, modernist, post-modernist, and country house novels, which genuinely illuminated the discussions (AO3). Many candidates were able to explore the impact of these contexts directly in relation to the question asked. For example, candidates considered how modernist themes of disillusionment and fragmentation are structurally embedded in *The Great Gatsby*, or how direct speech is used by Achebe to capture the Igbo people's oral traditions, proverbs, and idioms to counter colonial narratives in *Things Fall Apart*. Contextual information drawn from biographical, historical, and cultural sources can also be valuable, especially when used to inform our understanding of character in action.

A key message for Paper 3 Section A

Preparation for answering the Section A question is very important. Candidates who spend 10 minutes planning their response and 50 minutes writing are likely to be more successful than those who begin writing immediately. Concision is a virtue; some of the strongest Section A work seen in this session was around four sides of the answer booklet in length. Purposeful, question-focused, and well-organised responses always impress examiners.

For Question 1, the strongest responses came from candidates who identified a manageable range of structural devices - such as character development, shifts in settings, and temporal movements (flashbacks and flash-forwards) - and then analysed how each device is used to progress the narrative. Identifying these elements from the outset proved not only to be an effective approach for responding to a question on 'structure' but also served as an effective structuring device for the response itself.

For Question 2, the strongest work involved thinking about specific ways direct speech functions in the novel - such as shaping character identities, revealing social attitudes, and advancing the plot - and selecting examples from the text that best demonstrate these functions. Candidates who organised their answers to move from one function to another created cohesion and provided comprehensive coverage of the question. Several candidates sought to apply Paul Grice's conversational maxims to the dialogue in their novel, but this approach often felt awkward. Multi-layered dialogues in novels rarely conform to the principles of spontaneous conversation and usually serve multiple functions (as above) beyond mere conversational exchange. As a result, the application of the maxims felt rather reductive.

Question 1

Reading as a writer

1 In what ways does the writer of your text use structure?

You should range across the text to explore how features such as the way characters develop, movements between settings, and flashes forward and back are linked with the development of the narrative, and with the broader generic context. [32]

Jane Eyre

Candidates often engage with this novel in a very positive way and write about it with great enthusiasm. Many responses to this question showed a good understanding of how the novel is structured, with several candidates mentioning how the initial serialisation of the text has structural implications. Successful responses considered such issues as:

- Brontë's use of a first-person perspective providing an intimate and detailed account of Jane's thoughts, feelings and experiences, creating an emotional connection with the reader.
- the Bildungsroman structure of the novel follows a chronological coming-of-age format, tracing Jane's growth from an orphaned child to self-assured woman and how this journey of personal development is mirrored in the physical journey between settings in the novel
- the incorporation of Gothic motifs, such as mysterious settings, supernatural occurrences, and dark secrets enhances the suspense and intensity of the narrative
- Brontë's use of parallelism compares Jane's experiences with those of other characters, such as the contrast between her and Bertha Mason, to explore themes of independence, identity and social class.

Exemplar 1

1	<p>In "Jane Eyre", Charlotte Brontë utilises structure to convey meaning throughout the text as a whole. This includes the use of: time, location and narrative voice.</p> <p>To convey a sense of time, Brontë utilises structure. This is achieved through her use of chronology. Jane Eyre consists of an autodiegetic, retrospective narrator – an older and wiser Jane – to provide situational context as well as to conceptualise the former Jane's thoughts and opinions. This narrator is present throughout the book, providing much needed insight into Jane's psyche – conventional of the autobiographical nature of the novel, despite it being fictional. In many cases throughout the novel, this older Jane presents jumps in time that accentuate the linear writing style. An example of this is found within the line: "I now pass a space of eight years almost in silence.". Brontë's use of notations of time within these declarative emphasises the importance of time to the narrative of the novel. Brontë's use of the abstract noun "silence" rationalises the lack of importance of the years skipped, and is more conventionally fitting to</p>
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the writing style of a memoir, recounting specific notable moments. All that I have mentioned links to the novel's Bildungsroman genre, exemplifying the growth of a character over time - reflective of Jane's arc of finding both love and enlightenment. Moreover, the use of time within the novel is vital to Jane's moments of introspection such as within the red room setting. This is demonstrated within the line "what a consternation of soul was mine that dreary afternoon." Brontë's use of pathetic fallacy within the noun phrase "dreary afternoon" - emphasised by the premodifying adjective "dreary" - helps serve to reflect the "tumult" of Jane's mind viscerally, achieved through the use of figurative language attributed to the older Jane. The emphasis placed on the older Jane's use of language, when contrasted with her younger self, depicts a character arc that is explored through Brontë's reliance on Jane as an autodiegetic narrator and is emphasised by a reliance on time as a structural technique.

Brontë's use of location and setting as a structural technique conveys meaning within Jane Eyre. The novel was

originally released in three volumes - a triptych - and under the pseudonym "Currer Bell." Brontë's use of a pseudonym relates to the proto-feminist nature of the novel and links to her use of setting. Due to the division of the novel into three parts; Part 1 ending in chapter 15, Part 2 in Chapter 27 and the final part being the ending, Brontë relied on demarcation points within the locations settings present to further engage the reader. This is done through pacing, with each part featuring roughly two locations, an emphasis is placed on the journey Jane goes on as a character, reflective of the novel's nature as a part of the Bildungsroman genre. There are 5 primary settings within Jane Eyre: Gateshead, Lowood, Thornfield, Moore house and Ferndean, with the names of each potentially being aptonyms reflective of Jane's point in the narrative. The first part of the triptych ends ~~with~~ after the first fire in Thornfield, a use of foreshadowing by Brontë that accentuates Rochester's rebirth through flame. This part ends on a cliffhanger that effectively engages the reader through its emphasis on the book's Romance Genre, highlighting

the growing relationship between Jane and Rochester as evidenced within the line: "my cherished preserver, good-night!". Brontë's use of the premodifying adjective "cherished" within the exclamation emphasises Rochester's feelings toward Jane through the positive connotations of the noun "preserver", further linking ~~the~~ to the emphasis on the Romance genre present within the cliffhanger at the end of Chapter 15. Moreover, the use of a cliffhanger to bookend the second part of the original triptych also serves to ~~emphasise~~ highlight the importance of the Romance genre that began with Jane's arrival at the third primary location: Thornfield. This is depicted through the line "'Farewell' was the cry of my heart as I left him. Despair added 'farewell forever!'" within Chapter 27, the Climax of the novel according to Freytag's narrative pyramid. Brontë's use of two exclamation marks in close proximity, combined with epizeuxis of the ~~word~~ verb "farewell" serve to emphasise the dramatic and emotional aspects of the Romance genre present within the novel. This is also accentuated ~~by~~ through the personification of "Despair" as a proper noun - displayed through its

		capitalisation. The same or similar techniques are used within the ending of the final part and subsequently the novel as a whole. The line "Reader I married him" taken from the denouement of the novel in chapter 38 is emphasised by its setting within the fifth and final location of "Ferndean". Brontë's use of a second person direct address to the "Reader" is a technique used by Brontë throughout the novel as a narrative technique to emphasise contextualise Jane's emotions. It is used in the ending however as a way to begin concluding a number of plotlines, and provides a sense of finality through the revelation that she does eventually marry Rochester, concluding the Romance genre.
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In Exemplar 1, the candidate considers the ways in which Charlotte Brontë uses structure in a clear, confident, and purposeful manner. The opening relates the particular narrative technique being considered to the meanings revealed. The candidate signposts how the question will be addressed by identifying the three structural elements that are to be considered from the outset. The response is clear on Brontë's use of temporal movements in the novel and uses critical terminology accurately and effectively. AO1 and AO2 linkages are created throughout. Word classes are accurately identified. The response makes good use of relevant contextual factors, particularly that of genre, and considers first-person narrative/autobiography, and Bildungsroman (AO3). Comments on the novel's first release as a triptych are similarly relevant to the question. The identification of how Brontë manipulates time is related specifically to the effects created in the narrative. As the candidate moves on to consider settings as a structural device, this is signposted. Though the candidate does not fully explore the third structural device identified, narrative voice, the response overall is detailed, fluent, well-organised, and analytical. It is a top Level 5 response.

The Great Gatsby

Examiners saw many strong responses to this question which evidenced an excellent knowledge of how the novel works structurally. The best responses were extremely authoritative. Some of the most successful answers considered factors such as:

Fitzgerald's use of a fragmented, non-linear narrative structure through Nick Carraway's recollections and flashbacks, which builds suspense and gradually reveals key plot points and character motivations

the symbolic use of time in the novel and how the novel's structure reflects the theme of time and its passage, including Gatsby's obsession with recreating the past and the novel's climactic events tied to significant dates, like Gatsby's parties and the tragic confrontation

the use of Nick as the first-person narrator to allow Fitzgerald to create a subjective account of the events, incorporating his observations and biases to influence the reader's understanding

the juxtaposition of different settings, such as West Egg, East Egg and the Valley of Ashes to highlight social class distinctions and the contrast between Gatsby's idealism and the starker reality of the world.

Things Fall Apart

Many candidates wrote extremely well on this novel and interweaved relevant historical, political and literary contexts. The most common structural elements considered by candidates were:

Achebe's incorporation of elements of traditional Igbo storytelling, including proverbs, folktales, and oral traditions, to reflect the cultural context and enhance the authenticity of the narrative

how the chronological sequencing of the novel, tracing Okonkwo's rise and fall within Igbo society, emphasises his personal journey and the broader cultural changes occurring during colonialism

how the structure contrasts pre-colonial Igbo society with the effects of British colonialism, using parallel narratives to explore the impact of this cultural collision on both individuals and society in general

how Achebe links Okonkwo's personal struggles to larger communal and historical events, demonstrating how individual actions are both influenced by, and contribute to, the fate of the Igbo community.

Atonement

It can be challenging for candidates to grasp the overall structure of Atonement and addressing this issue directly in Question 1 proved a struggle for many. Candidates often avoided the complex metafictional elements of the novel's structure and instead focused primarily on the different settings (such as the Tallis Estate, including the fountain and library; Dunkirk; the war hospital; and post-war London). Some of the more assured responses considered:

McEwan's use of narrative perspective, including first-person and third-person viewpoints, to provide different angles on the story

the use of significant temporal shifts and how the novel moves between different time periods (pre-war, wartime, and post-war) producing a non-linear timeline that reflects the characters' lives and the consequences of their actions over time

that the story is framed by Briony's act of writing, serving as a meta-narrative device and how the final section reveals Briony's role as the author of the story, exploring themes of guilt, atonement, and the nature of storytelling itself

the division of the novel into distinct sections, each focusing on different characters and settings, which allows McEwan to build a complex narrative.

Question 2

2 In what ways does the writer use direct speech to contribute to the narrative?

You should range across the text to explore the way characters speak, the function dialogue plays in the novel as a whole, and the broader generic context.

[32]

Jane Eyre

There were relatively few responses to this question, possibly due to the length and complexity of the narrative. The most successful responses considered how:

direct speech gives an insight into the personalities, values, and emotions of characters like Jane, Mr. Rochester, and others, allowing readers to understand their motivations and growth throughout the novel.

direct speech drives the plot as key turning points, such as Jane's confrontations with Mr. Rochester or her responses to various proposals, are created through dialogue and lead to significant developments in the story.

direct speech is used to create and escalate conflicts, such as the intense exchanges between Jane and Mr. Rochester, which build emotional tension and propel the narrative.

through direct speech, Brontë explores major themes like the impact of social class, morality, and gender roles. Jane's assertive dialogue often challenges the expectations placed on her as a woman and an orphan.

The Great Gatsby

Although less popular than Question 1 for *The Great Gatsby*, there were still a good number of responses. Some candidates struggled to differentiate between direct speech - the spoken words of characters enclosed in quotation marks that capture their personal voices, attitudes, and emotions - and Nick Carraway's narrative voice/internal monologue, which provides a reflective and subjective perspective on the events and characters, adding layers of interpretation and judgment absent from the direct speech. Stronger work ranged over several ways in which direct speech is used in the novel, including how:

direct speech gives insight into the personalities, values, and ambitions of characters like Gatsby, Daisy, Tom, and Nick, helping readers understand their motivations and complexities

dialogue captures the social attitudes and cultural milieu of the Jazz Age, highlighting themes of class and gender division, materialism, and the American Dream

key plot points and dramatic moments, such as Gatsby's confrontations with Tom and his interactions with Daisy, are driven forward through direct speech, advancing the narrative

direct speech is used to heighten emotional tension and conflict, particularly in scenes like the heated argument between Gatsby and Tom, which reveal underlying tensions and propel the story toward its climax.

Things Fall Apart

Examiners saw several strong responses to the question, and the rich dialogue of the novel provided plenty of opportunities for candidates to consider the role and function of direct speech. Some of the strongest work considered how:

direct speech in the novel incorporates Igbo proverbs, idioms, and traditional expressions, providing a strong sense of the cultural context and authenticity, and helping preserve the oral traditions of the Igbo people

through dialogue, Achebe reveals the personalities, values, and social standings of characters such as Okonkwo, Nwoye, and Ezinma, allowing readers to understand their motivations and growth

direct speech is used to articulate conflicts and tensions within the community and within families, such as the generational conflict between Okonkwo and Nwoye, and the clashes between traditional beliefs and colonial influences

dialogue helps explore key themes such as the clash between tradition and change, the impact of colonialism, and the struggles for power and identity, providing insights into the characters' perspectives on these issues.

Atonement

There were a limited number of responses to this question. Again, it was the case that the strongest ones looked closely at not just what characterises speech in the novel, but how it acts as a driver of the narrative. Among helpful points raised were how:

direct speech reveals the personalities and motivations of characters, such as Robbie's earnestness and Cecilia's conflicted feelings

dialogue plays a crucial role in the misunderstandings in the novel such as Briony's misinterpretation of Robbie's letter to Cecilia and the confrontation during the dinner party, showing how direct speech can escalate conflicts

through characters' conversations, social dynamics and class tensions are revealed, such as the interactions between Robbie and the Tallis family, particularly the condescending way Paul Marshall and Emily Tallis speak to him

direct speech enables exploration of themes of guilt, atonement, and the subjectivity of truth. Briony's later conversations with her sister Cecilia and Robbie, where she seeks forgiveness, underscore her internal struggle with guilt and her quest for atonement.

Section B overview

As in previous sessions, there was much to admire in the narrative writing for Question 3 (a) and the accompanying commentary for Question 3 (b). The strongest stories demonstrated tremendous creativity and control, especially considering the context of an examination. Examiners regularly expressed their admiration for these achievements. The best work showed a keen sense of generic conventions and techniques, convincingly using knowledge and experience gained as readers to inform the approach to creative writing.

This session showed a clearer understanding among candidates that they are expected to produce the opening of a narrative, not a complete story. Both the narratives and the commentaries evidenced a stronger grasp of what constitutes a narrative opening, particularly in shorter fiction. The reading that helps candidates prepare for this task will, of course, partly originate from the study of the novel undertaken for Section A, but wider reading of a variety of stories and shorter fiction is also extremely valuable. This wider reading is particularly helpful for understanding scale and what can be achieved in 500 words.

Most candidates understood the requirement to use the storyline prompts in a way that was faithful to their implied narrative arc. This does not mean that all of the prompts need to be incorporated or that they should appear in the original order; many candidates made effective use of analepsis and prolepsis in their story writing. However, it does mean that the narrative must have a clear connection with the prompts, both in detail and context. It is important that candidates understand this requirement and work on ways to weave the storyline prompts convincingly into their narratives.

Some candidates wrote stories that did not convince examiners of this connection. When this is the case, the mark scheme is clear that such responses cannot achieve a mark higher than Level 2 for Question 3 (a). Additionally, in Question 3 (b), responses that do not satisfy the examiner that they have engaged with the storyline arc implied in Question 3 (a) will be self-penalising and will not be able to achieve a mark higher than Level 2. Examiners apply this cap on Section B marks very reluctantly. It is important that candidates understand this requirement to avoid this penalty. It would be great measure of the continuing progress for this component if this penalty was not applied at all in next year's session and that all candidates receive the Section B marks that their knowledge, imagination, and creativity deserve.

The strongest Section B commentaries in this session demonstrated a firm grasp of how to apply methods of analysis and explore how meanings have been shaped in the narrative. These are transferable skills from Section A of this component and from elsewhere in the A Level. The best work skilfully dissects the composition, demonstrating a clear understanding of the mechanics of the narrative. These commentaries combine reflection and evaluation with analysis effectively.

Less effective commentaries tend to be descriptive rather than analytical comprising generalised statements or they function as a checklist of features. In the latter case, it seems as if Question 3 (b) is driving Question 3 (a) rather than the other way around, with pre-determined features embedded in the narrative to be commented upon in Question 3 (b). This approach probably works against creativity in Question 3 (a).

A key message for Paper 3 Section B

As well as considering a reader's generic expectations for the opening of a story - such as a possible 'hook,' an introduction to the main character(s) and/or setting, an inciting incident that propels the narrative, foreshadowing of future events, and the use of clear and engaging language - candidates would be well advised to think carefully about the *opening of their opening*. An arresting sentence or two at the start can be hugely effective in drawing the reader/examiner in and creating positive engagement. The strongest of these offered intriguing or enigmatic statements rather than ones designed to shock, setting the stage for the narrative to unfold.

As illustration, one response to Storyline 2 began: 'All houses are haunted by childhoods that once unfolded there, but Casey didn't yet know this as she made the return journey to her old home.' This compelling start raises many interesting possibilities for how the narrative will unfold, engaging the reader immediately.

Question 3 (a)**Writing as a reader****Either****Storyline 1**

- The police officer smashed the padlock on the slave-shed.
- Inside were a soiled duvet, a broken chair, and the slave, a thin creature in late middle age.
- 'Who's done this?' asked the officer. 'This is modern slavery.'
- The slave flinched in the sunshine. 'No-one. The owner is very kind to me. I'm given all I need.'
- 'But they say you've been working here for forty years, since you were a child.'
- A dreamy look came into the slave's eyes. 'I am a child.'

Or**Storyline 2**

- Casey had returned to the childhood home.
- It was haunted by a ghost that looked like Casey, but was much younger.
- 'Why've you come back?' it said. 'Go away! You didn't stay when I wanted you to. When we could have played together.'
- 'We can play together now.'
- 'You left me. You betrayed me,' said the ghost.
- 'You grew up.'

Storyline 1 was very popular with candidates, many of whom engaged with great sensitivity to this troubling contemporary issue. Candidates saw the possibilities within the prompts to explore the situation from the police officer's point of view, the victim of modern slavery, or a split narrative that moved between the two perspectives. Some stories provided very moving accounts of the moment the police officer and slave meet and the effects this has on each of them. Many candidates created a backstory for the police officer, which served to make the encounter even more resonant as we understood something of their feelings as they broke open the door.

Many candidates drew on conventions from police procedural dramas to create context, and in several instances, the discovery of the modern slave victim solved a cold case missing child enquiry from years before. However, in some instances, the volume of backstory needed to contextualise these issues left little space to address the main points of the storyline prompts, and the breaking of the door happened right at the end of the narrative opening. This seemed something of a missed opportunity.

In some cases, the police details seemed to have been drawn from US TV police procedural dramas, with terms such as 'rookie officer,' 'stakeout,' 'homicide,' and 'precinct' being used. It is probably better if candidates root their narratives in contexts closer to home to enhance believability. Some candidates went overboard in their description of the squalor of the slave-shed, with gruesome depictions of soiled bedding and the physical condition of the slave-victim. These descriptions were rather too graphic in certain instances and seemed to be drawing on horror story tropes that didn't sit comfortably with the tragic situation being uncovered by the police officer.

In general, candidates would be advised not to include overly graphic descriptions of events in their narratives, as the subtle, the implied, and the imagined tend to be more effective in creating meaning for a reader than a no-holds-barred depiction of a shocking situation.

Exemplar 2

3		
	a	Small figures draped in luminous rain coats trodded along the zebra crossing, with their elbow eyes a the reflective material of their jackets g gleaming in the dismal weather. A new school year had brought come with its stereotypical characteristics, of sparkling droplets of rain following the brow of every

telling from the September sky throwing the
know of every commuter, and a parade of
dewy-eyed mothers reluctantly dropping off
their little ones. Not much had changed since
my youth, I doubt it ever will.

At least this assignment sounds interesting.

A few ~~hundred~~ hundred metres south of the local
primary school, a happy family reported
sightings of a strange ~~erotic~~ figure two
doors down, and reports piled in on something
called modern slavery.

Breaching the front door of this ~~house~~ back was
problemless, and a ~~ke~~ young runner and his miniature
dog kindly let me know that no one had been in
the house for a good few months.

~~The garden in which this supposed 'slave-shed'~~
~~was was~~ decrepit,

The approach to the 'slave-shed' (as it were)
proved more difficult, with the tall grass
hiding the surprise of knotted weeds and
roots, all with their own stinging splendor.
The shed matched its decrepit description,
large enough for a human being to live; small
enough for a human being to suffer. The
dazzling padlock shown in my hand, and the

key movement, despite not opening, moved as easily as a needle pierces through skin. So I smashed it, ~~and the~~

As I gently nudged the door open, darkness enshrouded my vision, but the putrid stench of urine crept into every crevice of my sinuses. Overwhelmed by a pure sense of disgust and acid fumes, I thrust the door open to the chilling autumn breeze. And there, the light rays illuminated a being, something vaguely anthropomorphic, but I was not sure enough if I could call it a human.

It was a slave. If I had to picture in my mind what a slave was, this would be it. A crumpled, pasty, emaciated figure, curled into ball, gazed up at me with an innocent glint behind his stare.

'Hm... you - you - , this is modern slavery!' My mind raced but my mouth hung dry, ~~and~~ My lips fumbled for my question that would ease my discombabulation.

'Who's done this? Who are you? Where? How did you - Why?', you - you - look about forty, right?'

The figure moved, fragile enough to break at the touch.

'I am a child'

Two dreamy eyes matched my gaze, glosed in

		Naivety. And behind the figure a cartoon
		flag, and a life jacket, and a crumpled
		picture of a once: a happy joyous family.
		I drew the man into my arms, and he held
		onto my body with the determination to
		never let go.
		He was just a child.

Exemplar 2 shows an opening to a narrative in response to Storyline 1. Initially, the focus on children being dropped off at school, though nicely observed, feels oblique to the storyline prompts, but it functions to place the police officer in an everyday, real-world context. The happy families of the opening are later cohesively linked to the family who discover the slave-shed and ultimately to the photo of the slave-victim's own family. The turning point sentence, 'At least this assignment sounded interesting,' effectively changes the focus. The police officer's unfamiliarity with the term 'modern slavery' increases the sense of the likely impact of these events on him. The incorporation of mundane details (e.g., the runner and dog) helps create verisimilitude.

Some effective stylistic techniques are used – the juxtaposition of the shed being large enough to live in but small enough to suffer, and the abrupt use of the simple sentence 'So I smashed it.' Both techniques create a tonal change in the story. The evolving sense of the police officer's reaction to the slave-victim – from seeming revulsion to increasing compassion, indicated using 'fragile,' to the genuinely affecting embrace at the end, works very well. The candidate's use of the direct speech from the prompts is well embedded. The third reference to 'happy families' in the crumpled photograph and the suggestion of asylum seekers gives the story an additional contemporary twist. The ending is moving and tender.

This is Level 6 work that demonstrates flair, originality, and a high degree of control.

Storyline 2 was also popular, with many candidates exploring the relationship between Casey and the ghost version of Casey with great enthusiasm. There were a wide range of tones employed in the treatment of this relationship; in some instances, comic effects were used, rendering the encounter as a jovial meeting between a young adult and a mildly irritated apparition. In other instances, the ghost presented as a full-on poltergeist with vengeful intent. Many ghost story tropes were employed, often with great playfulness and imagination.

Other candidates considered the ghost version of Casey to be more an aspect of Casey's own psychology rather than an actualized phantom. This led to interesting possibilities for psychological exploration, examining what had created this division in versions of Casey's self. In some instances, this division originated in childhood trauma; in others, it was a function of the more everyday reality of dealing with the things we leave behind as we grow up. Lost childhood homes and their contents were often rendered very effectively by candidates.

As with Storyline 1, candidates told the story from different points of view: from grown-up Casey's viewpoint, from child Casey's, from the ghost's, or a combination of these perspectives. Some told the story from the point of view of the house itself, in one case with stunning effectiveness, with the house itself being the aggrieved ghost struggling to come to terms with the family having grown and moved on, leaving the house alone with its memories. Some stories got rather bogged down in backstory, with many past events and details about journeying to the house, leaving little space and few words to detail the encounter between the versions of Casey. Overall, stories that explored ideas of reunion, reconciliation, and healing resulting from Casey meeting the ghost, rather than conflict and violence, worked better for readers/examiners. The wry, the understated, the poignant, and the everyday rather than the overly dramatic or melodramatic seemed to be a more successful direction for the narrative writing overall.

Question 3 (b)

(b) Write a commentary on the narrative opening you have produced in 3(a).

Explain the narrative and linguistic choices you have made in response to the storyline prompts.

You should write approximately 250 words.

[14]

Section B overall is difficult to revise for in the traditional way, as strong achievement tends to reflect well-established learning of narrative techniques developed across the A Level, wider reading, the ability to apply concepts and methods, and critically analyse meanings. As mentioned in earlier reports for this component, it is understandable that some candidates will prepare in advance the methods they are going to identify in the commentary and then embed these same methods in their narrative. However, this can result in awkwardness in both halves of Section B, as the methods chosen might not readily fit the direction of the storyline prompts, leading to them being rather shoehorned in or causing the candidate to deviate too far from the prompts. An unconvincing application of effects in Question 3 (a) is often followed by an unconvincing account of them in Question 3 (b).

Question 3(b), the commentary, has 14 marks available and is assessed against AO1 and AO2. Candidates can employ the analytical skills they have developed for Section A and other components to good effect in the commentary. The best commentaries combine analysis of methods with reflection and evaluation of outcomes. As mentioned in previous reports, the strongest commentaries are in conversation with the narrative, exploring, explaining, and illuminating it. These commentaries are full of AO1 and AO2 analysis, with links between them developed throughout. In every session, examiners report that reading the commentary can lead them to new levels of understanding of the narrative. Of course, the narrative should make meaning for the reader as a standalone exercise, but the commentary can offer new insights and ways of understanding the story opening. Some examiners read the commentary before reading the story and find that helpful in creating a full appreciation of Section B responses in their totality.

The commentary should be around 250 words in length. It is an exercise in concision. Candidates should prepare for this element by practising writing as economically and purposefully as they can, perhaps writing at greater length initially before editing their work down to the required length. A wide range of achievement in commentary writing was evident in this session, as previously. Surprisingly, some candidates write very brief responses of around 100 to 150 words. In these instances, the commentary can seem something of an add-on or afterthought; with 14 marks on offer, this is an important part of the assessment, and very short responses are unlikely to demonstrate the developed critical analysis required for the higher levels of the mark scheme.

It can be the case that candidates achieve Level 4 or even Level 5 for the narrative but only Level 3 for an undeveloped commentary, which obviously deflates their overall mark. This likely arises from exam time management issues and underestimating the amount of time available to complete Section B, especially in those instances where candidates have written at too great a length in Question 3 (a). There are only four marks difference between Question 3 (a) and Question 3 (b) - 44% of the marks for Question 3 (b) - so candidates should allocate around 25 minutes to complete this element of the assessment.

Exemplar 3

3b	<p>In my story I have made use of a homodiegetic, first person narrative so that I could control and manipulate what the reader was exposed to and create anticipation of the narrator returning to her dead sister. The first person narrative also provided the story with insight to the sentiment of returning to her home and the emotions of sorrow that the narrator will feel.</p> <p>In my opening, I have first introduced the symbolism of the 'mirror' which her 'reflection glared back at me' which I have used to symbolise that the narrator sees herself within the ghost of her sister to enhance the emotion of the narrator seeing her dead sister and foreshadow the presence of the ghost. In which embodies the narrator's The dynamic verb phrase 'glared back at me' uses lexical parallelism of the ghost that 'now glared back at me' to foreshadow her later presence.</p> <p>I have also used pathetic fallacy within the 'grey clouds' which loomed above to establish an ominous tone. The same verb 'loomed' subtly reflects that the narrator is haunted by the ghost of her sister, thus foregrounding her appearance.</p>
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I have ~~used~~ used a juxtaposition in the description of 'appeared alone' and 'lively cheeriness' to embody the contrast of life and death of the narrator and the ghost of her sister.

Moreover, my use of descriptive language in the 'winding driveway and broken of grey, worned ~~roads~~ and decaying walls' contributes to the ominous tone that I have already established, preparing the reader for the encounter of the narrator with the ghost of her sister.

My use of dialogue reflects the tragedy of the death of her sister as it ~~reflects~~ symbolises the conversations and interactions that they would have had together ~~if she was still alive~~ if she was still alive.

My use of anaphora of 'Enemy of me' ~~and~~ 'Enemy of my blood' euphemises the tragedy of her sister's death through pathos as the narrator has a sense of guilt for her sister's death.

The resolution uses particularly emotive language of 'Death had stolen her' to heighten the tragedy of the story and unfairness of death. ~~Death as a concept~~ The abstract noun 'death' is personified to have 'stolen her' through the dynamic verb to highlight the grief and pain that the narrator felt. Ultimately this sense of pain and sorrow evident in my response to

		the 'grief' with the 'exact same pain' is too
		much for the narrator and the narrator chooses
		to leave behind her sister forever, letting go of her
		and beginning to move on with her life. My use
		of emotive language is reference to 'go abstract
		noun 'grief' and the adverbial phrase 'exact
		same' heighten the sorrowful emotions of the narrator
		and use pathos within the reader to provide a
		resolution that the narrator must let her go
		'forever' and 'never to return again'.

The Exemplar 3 commentary is detailed and effective, thoughtfully incorporating analytical and reflective elements. The narrative positioning identified in the story (homodiegetic) links to the learning developed for Section A of this component. There are direct links between AO1 and AO2 throughout, with a feature identified and an effect attributed to it. A good number of techniques are accurately identified and commented on, such as symbolism, foreshadowing, foregrounding, juxtaposition, anaphora, personification, and pathos. Grammatical features are mostly accurately labelled, and their purposes are explored. The commentary provides an illuminating account of narrative intentions and outcomes. This is Level 6 work that demonstrates an excellent application of relevant concepts and methods, is fluently written, and shows a fully developed critical analysis of ways in which meanings are shaped.

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