

**GCSE**

**Examiners' report**

# **ENGLISH LANGUAGE**

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**J351**

For first teaching in 2015

**J351/02 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 2 series overview

The J351/02 GCSE (9–1) English Language – Exploring effects and impact component assesses candidates' ability to:

- read and respond to 20th century fiction texts and
- write imaginatively and creatively.

Candidates should answer the questions in the order that they are given, as each question is designed to prepare students for the next question. This includes responding to the writing, as the topics of both writing tasks draw on themes and ideas explored in the reading section, as well as encourage candidates to demonstrate structure and language techniques and devices that they will have engaged with in the reading section.

The short answer questions in Question 1 require focus on an early section of Text 1. Questions 2 and 3 draw candidates' attention to how the writers use language and structure to achieve effects. A short section of Text 1 is used for Question 2 and a longer section of Text 2 is used for Question 3. Question 4 uses both texts and requires the candidates to respond to a question in which they will demonstrate their ability to compare the writers' ideas and perspectives and how they are conveyed as well as evaluate the texts in light of a statement that could be applied to both of them. Candidates are encouraged to recast appropriate material from their responses to earlier questions in their Question 4 responses, but should make sure that they read and refer to the full texts.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• read the texts carefully and thoughtfully</li> <li>• read the questions carefully</li> <li>• paid careful attention to line references in Questions 1, 2 and 3</li> <li>• took an overview of the sections of text they were directed to, especially in Question 3</li> <li>• selected relevant textual evidence/short quotations</li> <li>• analysed the effects of language and structure in Questions 2 and 3</li> <li>• referred to the complete texts in Question 4</li> <li>• planned and structured their responses to Question 5/6 carefully for effect: there was a clear shape with a discernible beginning, middle and end</li> <li>• made effective use of sentence structures, punctuation and vocabulary in Question 5/6.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• did not read the texts properly</li> <li>• misread the questions</li> <li>• wrote about material from outside the designated lines in Questions 1, 2 and 3</li> <li>• focused on language and structure features without a clear understanding or overview of the sections of text they were directed to, especially in Question 3</li> <li>• asserted ideas without using clear support from the text or explanation</li> <li>• made generic comments about the use of devices in Questions 2 and 3</li> <li>• made no comparisons in Question 4</li> <li>• limited their responses to Question 4 to the lines specified in Questions 2 and 3</li> <li>• did not plan their responses to Question 5/6, so that writing became a mere sequence of events</li> <li>• made errors in sentence structures and spelling in Question 5/6</li> <li>• wrote too much in Question 5/6.</li> </ul>

## Section A overview

J351/02 Exploring effects and impacts uses two unseen literary prose texts, one of which may be literary non-fiction. Both texts were published in the 20<sup>th</sup> or 21<sup>st</sup> century and they are linked thematically. As this qualification is not tiered, either or both texts may be slightly edited to make sure that they are both accessible for all candidates and challenging for the most able.

For summer 2024, Text 1 was an extract from Abdulrazak Gurnah's novel *Paradise* (published in 1994). Eleven-year-old Yusuf has been sent from his home in East Africa to work in a shop. A young man called Khalil is teaching him the work. Yusuf has to sleep in the street outside the shop at night, where he is frightened by local stray dogs. Text 2 is an extract from the novel *The Devil's Edge* by Stephen Booth (published in 2011). Cooper is a policeman looking for a murder suspect at night near a cliff edge. While looking out over a cliff edge at the surrounding Derwent Valley he undergoes an experience that he attributes to vertigo.

## Section A

### Question 1

Question 1 assesses AO1: candidates' ability to select and interpret information. It uses a very short section (in this case one paragraph) from early on in Text 1. It is designed to provide an accessible start to the examination by helping candidates to read closely a small section of one of their texts. All candidates should be able to achieve some marks in this section.

### Questions 2 and 3

Questions 2 and 3 assess AO2: candidates' ability to comment on and analyse how writers use language and structure to achieve effects and influence readers, using relevant subject terminology to support their views. Question 2 uses a short piece of text from Text 1 and Question 3 uses a longer piece of text from Text 2.

### Question 4

Question 4 assesses:

AO3: comparing writers' ideas and perspectives, as well as how these are conveyed, across two or more texts and

AO4: evaluating texts critically and supporting this with appropriate textual references.

Question 4 requires candidates to read and refer to both texts.

### OCR support



A delivery guide for teaching how to read unseen 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century literary texts may be found here: [Approaching Unseen 20th and 21st Century Literary Texts](#)

## Question 1 (a)

## Reading meaning and effects

Question 1 is about **Text 1**, *Paradise* by Abdulrazak Gurnah.

1 Look at lines 1–5.

(a) Give **three** words or phrases that show what the dogs do at night.

1 .....

2 .....

3 .....

[3]

There were very few candidates who could not identify any words or phrases that show what the dogs do at night. Mostly they were able to select three of the following:

- '(they were) **plagued** (by dogs)'
- '(dogs which) **roamed** (the dark streets)'
- '(The dogs) **roamed** (in packs)'
- '**loping** (and alert)'
- '(as they) **scuffled** (in shadows and thickets)'
- '(their) **scuttling** (paws on the road)'
- '(they) **ran** (past)'
- '(four dogs) **standing immobile** (across the road from them)'

The bracketed words indicate how much excess was allowed outside a correct response (the correct response is in bold). Where candidates offered too much excess, the response could not be considered to meet the AO1 requirements 'to identify' and 'to select'. Just occasionally candidates offered answers that weren't quotations or came from outside the prescribed lines.

## Question 1 (b)

(b) Explain how the dogs woke up Yusuf.

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

Most candidates were able to explain how the dogs woke up Yusuf. They could earn the mark for this question in any of the following ways:

- '(Yusuf was woken by their) scuttling paws (on the road)'.
- Any sentence including the phrase 'scuttling paws' that answers the question.
- Any explanation in own words that could be reasonably inferred from the passage, e.g. 'Their movements/noises/sounds wake him up'.

## Question 2

Question 2 is about **Text 1**, *Paradise* by Abdulrazak Gurnah.

2 Look at lines 6–13.

How does Abdulrazak Gurnah use language and structure to show that the dogs terrify Yusuf?

You should use relevant subject terminology to support your answer.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

..... [6]

### OCR support



A teaching guide about writing about language and structure can be found on the OCR website using the following link:

[GCSE English Language J351 - Language and structure guide](#)

Very often the small section of Text 1 used for Question 2 follows very closely on from the section of text used for Question 1, as it did this session. This sequencing is intended to assist candidates on their reading journey through Text 1. There are 6 marks for this question and candidates are given just one page in their answer booklet to write their response on. This reflects the expected length of their response.

Good responses picked up on a range of language and structural devices that suggest the dogs' malevolence and imply their intentions towards Yusuf. Some candidates commented on the motifs of the horror genre (the repeated references to the nighttime setting and the presence of the moon). Others had ideas linked to the impact of opening and closing the paragraph with short sentences. Most impressive and discerning were those occasional responses that recognised that the reader is being offered Yusuf's perspective and therefore sees the dogs through his eyes only: there are some very clear indications that Yusuf's own imagination is filling in the gaps between the dogs' actions and what they intend (the reference to how the 'dogs yelp and turn away' suggest they are possibly as frightened of him as he is of them).

A common misreading was in the start of the third sentence, where some candidates took 'lifeless' and 'glare' to refer to the moon (in fact, they are descriptions of the dogs). There were some wrongly identified parts of speech: 'terror' was quite frequently referred to as an 'adjective'.



## Exemplar 1

The ribbance of 'shocked him out of sleep' later followed by 'standing silently' shows how Yessy was terrified of the dogs as he viewed them as evil. The repeating 's' sound linking the dogs to snakes, the creation of all evil & in the bible. The simile 'as if to a plan' paints the dogs as cunning and conniving, intelligent enough to formulate ideas, giving them human-like qualities. This shows Yessy is terrified as he views the dogs as an evil threat and that they are more like satanic creatures than normal dogs.

The vivid imagery of 'jilted Yessy's mind with nightmares' shows the effect on Yessy - he is not only seeing them when he wakes up, but also in his sleep, implying he is thinking <sup>about them</sup> and fearing them so much they are in his subconscious while sleeping, showing just how scared he is. The repetition of 'night' in the sentence opener 'right after night' reveals this experience is recurring, showing the dogs don't just scare him one night, but every night showing their consistent impact on him. This sentence ending with the imagery 'swelling moon' likens the dogs to werewolves, implying they are something of a supernatural occurrence and as dangerous as wolves, showing how Yessy is terrified as he compares them to such horrific, unearthly creatures.

This was a sophisticated and (for Question 2) quite wide-ranging response with some skilled analysis. Particularly impressive are the comments on 'as if to a plan' and 'the swelling moon' as well as the repetition of 'night'. The response secured full marks.

## Question 3

Question 3 is about **Text 2**, *The Devil's Edge* by Stephen Booth.

**3** Look at lines 6–21.

Explore how Stephen Booth uses language and structure to describe Cooper's feelings at the cliff edge.

Support your ideas by using relevant subject terminology.

**[12]**

Question 3 assesses the same AO2 skills as Question 2 but uses a lengthier section of Text 2.

Strong responses took an overview of this extract and understood that there were changes in the way Cooper was feeling and that these changes were marked by paragraph changes. The first paragraph describes his view of the Derwent Valley, which can be seen as quite unsettling and unnerving. The second paragraph describes the onset of vertigo or a kind of a panic attack which could plausibly be attributed to the uncomfortable reactions Cooper had to the view previously described. The third paragraph sees Cooper recovering from what was just a momentary attack and reflecting on the causes of it.

Candidates who did not read carefully or chronologically often looked for language choices, or devices such as alliteration and personification, to illustrate what they had decided was Cooper's single feeling of 'fear' throughout this section of text: this could and did lead to misreading in places. Candidates really need to consider how writers use language and structure in context of the text. That means they should be encouraged to read the extract in full before committing themselves to ideas about the impacts of language and structure.

### Misreading



A common error is reading out of context and falling back on stereotypical ideas linked with images and devices. For example, candidates often selected the simile in the second paragraph of the text for consideration: 'the lights of villages here and there like clusters of beads strung up the hillsides'. However, comments about such things as 'beauty' and Cooper's 'enjoyment' of the view suggested that candidates had not thought about this image in context. Better candidates offered ideas to do with height and insignificance because they understood that the view of the landscape played a role in unsettling Cooper, leading to his attack of vertigo minutes later.

## Question 4

Question 4 is about **Text 1**, *Paradise* and **Text 2**, *The Devil's Edge*.

**4** 'Both texts powerfully present fear.'

How far do you agree with this statement?

In your answer you should:

- discuss the things that make the characters afraid
- explain how far the characters are afraid
- compare how writers present different kinds of fear.

Support your response with quotations from **Text 1** and **Text 2**.

**[18]**

The first three questions on this examination prepare candidates for Question 4, which is worth the same number of marks as Questions 2 and 3 put together. For this reason, candidates should stop at this point and think carefully about how they will frame their response before they start writing. They might also consider any relevant material they have written in their responses to Questions 1, 2 and 3 and how it may be recast appropriately to address the question here.

That said, it is also important for candidates to be aware that Question 4 rewards most highly a response to the whole text. The mark scheme makes this clear by referring to 'evaluative comments' in AO4 for Levels 2 to 4 and 'evaluation' in Levels 5 and 6. 'Evaluative comments' are judgements in relation to smaller sections of the text; 'evaluation' requires overview. This means that a careful reread of whole texts is important before thinking out and planning the response.

A plan for Question 4 is key to a strong response. Five minutes spent jotting down ways in which the statement given can be agreed with or challenged makes for an organised response and probably speeds up actual writing time. It was pleasing to see that many candidates do plan (as was evident from their opening paragraphs in which they outlined the directions their essays were going to take), but not all do: some responses got rather lost, repeated themselves or even contradicted themselves, indicating that the candidates hadn't thought out their ideas beforehand.

AO3 was rather more successful this summer than last, with many candidates finding very valid ways in which to draw connections between the two texts in relation to the statement. Common points of comparison were setting; relative control over the situation the characters found themselves in; nature of the fear (including reasons for it), and how long the fear lasted. This year fewer responses offered alternating blocks of evaluation for each text without making it clear how they were being compared. This was pleasing.

It was also pleasing to see some quite challenging ideas being teased out in AO4 – and with some articulacy. Many candidates explored with some thoroughness how each writer conveys the fear of the main characters; some drew on their knowledge of horror and supernatural genres to explore how the writers used such features to powerfully present fear; others explored the impacts of fear on the characters (Yusuf's nightmares and Cooper's sudden onset of vertigo). There were many interesting and very credible responses here.

## Key point

When planning their responses to Question 4, candidates should heed the bullet points given. The first two bullets aid with ideas for AO4; the third bullet prompts ideas for AO3. Able candidates will understand that they do not need to structure their responses to follow the order of the bullets, but they should have an eye on them during the planning of their response to make sure that they cover the ideas suggested.

## Exemplar 2

Both texts present real fear, but this is established by both authors to be a fear of a possible event which doesn't ever happen. For example in text 1 Yuany's mind is 'filled with nightmares' by irrational images of the dogs ~~being~~ 'standing two-legged over him, their long mouths half open and slavering'. The irrationality of this image as dogs typically use four legs enhances the feeling of possibility surrounding the extract, and a sense of ambiguity over how dangerous the dogs actually are. This is furthered when we read that his 'fear was mixed with shame', as he is the only one affected by these dogs, showing he is aware of the lack of real danger threat the dogs pose and it is more his perception of them as known and unknown which makes them frightening. Similarly, in text 2 Cope understands the fact that his fear lacks reason, because while there are many descriptions of his 'primal fear', he also 'knew he wasn't going to fall' and describes the ~~very~~ area as 'a dark forest of superstition'. The reference to 'superstition' implies his acknowledgement of the

irrationality of the situation. However, it also suggests that he is not the only person to have felt this fear, and that others may have felt the same way, as he mentions 'the minds of people' who have already visited. This contrasts the idea in Text 1 that Yusuf is the only one feeling fear, making Text 2 present fear more powerfully as it affects people more widely.

This is an extract from a Question 4 response that scored Level 4 in AO3 and Level 6 in AO4. You can see from this extract that the candidate has probed the surface meanings of Text 1 to understand that Yusuf's fear is probably irrational and there is good supporting evidence for that. This is a sophisticated reading, since most candidates assumed that the dogs had all the malicious intention that Yusuf attributes to them. The same can be said about their response to Text 2 where they have ranged appropriately around the text to find evidence for their evaluation here. See above for the differences between 'evaluative comments' and 'evaluation'.

## Section B overview

Questions 5 and 6 assess:

AO5: Communicate clearly, effectively and imaginatively, selecting and adapting tone, style and register for different forms, purposes and audiences.

Organise information and ideas, using structural and grammatical features to support coherence and cohesion of texts.

AO6: Use a range of vocabulary and sentence structures for clarity, purpose and effect, with accurate spelling and punctuation.

Candidates are offered a choice of writing tasks. They choose either Question 5 or Question 6.

The writing tasks are designed to build on what candidates have read in Section A of the examination. It is unwise to advise candidates to do the writing task first because candidates may be able to use what they have read to inspire the content and style of their own writing.

### Question 5\*

#### Writing imaginatively and creatively

**5\*** Out at Night.

Use this as the title for a story.

In your writing you should:

- choose a clear viewpoint
- describe the setting
- explore the character's thoughts and feelings about their experience.

**[40]**

This was by far and away the most popular writing choice this year and it was satisfying to see that so many candidates had written a useful plan.

Examiners had the pleasure of reading many crafted pieces of writing, where candidates had used such techniques as setting, flashback, change of narratorial perspectives, hooking, surprise endings and many others. Candidates seemed aware of how paragraphing and sentence lengths can be used to good effect. There were also some lovely images and language choices, usually in describing a nighttime landscape.

Weaknesses often lay in an inability to maintain tense appropriately (especially if candidates had started ambitiously in present tense); some loss of control of sentence structures when writing descriptively, and sentence punctuation.

As ever the best stories were ones that came from the candidates' real, or easily imagined, experience. The least successful were clearly derivative, based on film or video game genres. Some responses were a sequence of unrelated events.

## Question 6 \*

6\* Write about a memorable time you spent with an animal.

You should write about:

- what was memorable about that time
- how it affected your thoughts and feelings
- how you feel about that time now.

[40]

Question 6 invites a first-person narrative and possibly an autobiographical response. Mostly this is how candidates did approach the task. Some, however, assumed a persona to write what was clearly quite engaging fiction.

Many candidates wrote movingly about a pet animal they have or used to have. Some wrote successfully about unexpected encounters with unusual or exotic creatures. The key word in this task was 'memorable' and the candidates who managed to convey convincingly how their time with the animal was 'memorable' often did well.

Strengths and weaknesses in candidates' writing were similar to those outlined in the Question 5 commentary above.

### Exemplar 3

6) It was a Friday afternoon, after school, when I went to my best friend's house (she's called Lila if you must know). Her mum picked us up<sup>after school</sup> and took us to get milkshakes, at the new dessert shop that opened in town. I got chocolate, and Lila got banana. During the drive to her house, I managed to spill mine all over my uniform and



onto her mum's car seat. ~~Expecting to get~~ The mixture of white and brown lumpy splodge started to seep into the <sup>a cracks of the leather</sup> seats and ~~begin to~~ <sup>all</sup> made it sticky. ~~I~~ Using a napkin, I tried to clean as much of it off, but it didn't help, and so I told her mum. Expecting her to be angry or annoyed, I apologised profusely, but her mum laughed and jokingly said "at least they aren't cotton seats" and we joked about it all the way to her house.

Once we got to her house, we went to her room and I changed into some of her old clothes. Lia went downstairs to get us some snacks so we could watch a movie. I looked out her window, to see her mum scrubbing at her seats, guilt ~~creeping~~ creeping inside me, but that quickly was replaced with fear.

A big, black dog ~~I don't remember the breed~~ ~~because I don't~~ was running around their driveway, it ~~was~~ mouth open, tongue sticking out and its tail wagging like a propeller. Their dog.

~~I~~ I had completely forgotten they had a dog. Since I was little, I had a fear of dogs because my neighbours <sup>dog</sup> ~~one~~ used to chase me around our



Street everytime I would go play outside. ~~then~~  
My neighbours dog was the exact same as Lila's  
dog but it was brown, called Rosie, possibly a  
Golden Retriever? ~~But~~ These incidents had left me  
mentally traumatised and scarred, and I refused  
to be near any dogs, big or small.

When Lila returned with the snacks, I expressed  
my concern with her. At first she laughed at me,  
when I told her why I disliked dogs, but then  
told her parents to keep the dog in the living  
room, which they understood and didn't mind.

Later that evening, we were having dinner, when  
Lila's dad's phone rang, which was in the living  
room. As he went to get it, he left the living  
room door open, and their dog escaped. It stared  
at me, it's tail & wagging, it's mouth open with  
it's tongue out. The colour drained from my face  
my heart ~~to~~ must've been beating out of my chest  
and a wave of panic flooded me.

The dog came up to me, sniffing me like prey,  
and jumped ~~and~~ half onto me. I froze.

Her mum advised me to just give him a pet and  
he would leave me. So I did. Gradually and

cautiously I tapped his head. He backed down immediately. Relief washed over me. But something new had happened. I had <sup>gotten</sup> ~~come~~ over my fear. After dinner, we played with the dog in her garden. I had gotten over my fear and started to enjoy being around dogs.

Looking back now, I feel silly and stupid for being scared, but it helped me overcome my fears, which has helped me ~~not~~ <sup>grow</sup> as a person and try new things.

\*It's large paws covering my thigh, it's <sup>neary</sup> ~~towering~~ over me, ~~like a giant~~.

This response to Question 6 achieved marks in Level 4 for AO5 and Level 3 for AO6. Tone, style and register are lively and sustained, matching the AO5 Level 5 criteria. Unfortunately, the candidate does not appear to have planned the response effectively. The first page of writing contains incidental detail irrelevant to what was meant to be the focus of the task – time spent with an animal. For this reason, the structure of the piece could not be seen as 'controlled' or even 'well-managed' (Level 5 and 4 descriptors) but could be seen as 'clear' (Level 3). A compromise mark in Level 4 was found for AO5.

It is important to point out here that not all approaches where the focus of the task comes late in the narrative are indicative of poor planning: candidates should not be deterred from writing introductions that are relevant to the task – this is to be encouraged as one way in which candidates can prepare, 'hook' or in other ways set readers up for, in this case, an appreciation of how and why the time spent with an animal was 'memorable'.

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