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Edexcel

Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

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Pearson Edexcel GCE

English Literature (9ET0)

Paper 3: Poetry

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Introduction

The reduced cohort and unusual circumstances made this examination different to previous years. Whilst there were a number of effective responses in the Level 4 and 5 areas, few were at the very top of the range. Conversely, there were only a few really weak answers; there was a preponderance towards mid Level 2 to low Level 3 with fewer responses in the middle of the mark range. There were signs of the effect of the time elapsed since the candidates were likely to have been in centres in the early spring and the distinctive nature of those seeking a re-sit in the tendency in the middle and lower levels for candidates to rely on prepared interpretations of the set poems, rather than looking at the texts afresh in the light of the questions. In Section B, context was less detailed than we have come to expect and often took the form of generalised biographical links or broad statements about the literary period.

Section A

Questions 1 and 2, involving comparison of an unseen poem with a set poem, proved similar in difficulty to previous series. Responses were almost equally spread between the two questions. Although the 2020 unseen poem *Visitor* might have appeared at first glance rather less enigmatic than last year's *Two Trees*, the poem's nuances proved useful in discriminating between levels of achievement. This poem was too often treated as straightforward - relatively few explored the ambiguity of the 'you' addressed in the poem and the significance of the apparently random objects itemised in the final stanza. Candidates appeared as well prepared on the set poems from the anthology as in previous years, though these sometimes relied too heavily on a predetermined interpretation. Discussion of Armitage's *Chainsaw Versus the Pampas Grass* (Question 2), for example, often fixed on the idea of a male-female conflict rather than addressing the focus of the question on the wider topic of gardens in both poems.

The lessons for teachers and students preparing for future examinations are similar of those from previous years:

- Devote plenty of time to reading, or re-reading, the poems, reflecting on the overall impact and aspects of the poets' craft such as tone and structure.
- Don't jump to hasty conclusions about what poems 'mean'; be aware of ambiguity, consider alternatives and be prepared to reconsider your interpretations as you explore the texts in detail.
- Integrate comparison from the start.
- Plan your answer: aim to lead the reader on a clear path through your argument.

Section B

Questions followed the pattern set in previous years and presented candidates with a similar level of challenge. Responses covered a narrow range of questions, with some not covered at all and others having just a handful of responses. The Romantic poetry anthology and the Keats selection were the most popular texts.

Most students had a sound grasp of at least one of the poems they wrote about, though there seemed to be more questionable choice of second poems, not always fitting satisfactorily with the topic set. Context was rather more general and less successfully integrated than we have come to expect - perhaps as a result of the disruption to students' study.

Lessons for the future are again similar to those from earlier series:

- Refresh your memory of the set poem in the light of the topic before selecting your second poem - make sure that also helps you address the question.
- Aim to integrate contextual aspects throughout your response rather than as a separate section and avoid generalities - tie context to details of the texts.
- Comparison is not required in Section B and can be unhelpful if it becomes a focus; the second poem can illustrate a similar or different aspect of the topic and context.

