



EXAMINERS' REPORT ON THE 2001 TERTIARY ENTRANCE EXAMINATION

SUBJECT: ENGLISH LITERATURE

STATISTICS

Year	Number Who Sat	Non-Examination Candidates	Did Not Sit
2001	2704	21	78
2000	2641	23	81
1999	2940	31	107

The Examiners' Report is written by the Chief Examiner (or another Examiner on their behalf) to comment on matters relating to the Tertiary Entrance Examination in their subject. The opinions and recommendations expressed in this report are those of the Chief Examiner and not necessarily representative of or endorsed by the Curriculum Council.

The Marking Guide provided at the end of this report was prepared for markers and may have been substantially amplified by discussions held in the pre-marking meeting. It is not intended as a set of model answers, and is not exhaustive as regards alternative answers. Some of the answers are less than perfect, but represent a standard of response that the examiners deemed sufficient to earn full marks. Teachers who use this guide should do so with its original purpose in mind.

SUMMARY/ABSTRACT

The examination paper was judged to have acted as a reliable discriminator of student ability and to have reflected the syllabus. The paper offered a range of questions, some of which were more challenging than others. As is always the case with such papers, a candidate's choice of question, or choice of text, could easily determine success or failure. A teacher's guidance about examination technique could help students make the most of their potential. In addition, advice to candidates to prepare as wide a range of texts as possible for the examination would prevent candidate hysteria if, for some reason, favourite texts or pre-rehearsed questions do not appear on the paper.

Although markers varied widely in their response to candidate ability, the general view was that candidates knew their texts fairly well, but tended to muddle key literary concepts. Candidates often preferred to retell the plot or discuss social issues, rather than develop an argument that relates text to context, or textual elements to the primary focus under investigation.

GENERAL COMMENTS

The English Literature examination was generally deemed to be a fair paper, which covered the syllabus and offered a broad range of questions. Although some questions were more popular than others, the distribution was more evenly spread than last year, which demonstrates its versatility across the spectrum. The new marking system worked well, and the Examining Panel and markers would like to thank and congratulate Mr Roland Leach for being an exemplary Chief Marker. The marking of the English Literature examination paper was divided into four sections (Texts & Contexts, Prose Fiction, Poetry and Drama). Statistically, the examination was shown to be a more reliable discriminating indicator than last year's paper and made full use of the scale used to evaluate the candidates.

Candidates, in the main, were well prepared as far as the texts were concerned. The usual confusions concerning literary terms were exhibited, as was the common error of retelling plots and describing textual elements, instead of utilising them as evidence. Perhaps more work could be done to teach candidates how to mount an argument, although even a Trojan effort in this area will inevitably meet with varied success. There is some evidence that

texts are taught in isolation from their context, for many markers noted hilarious errors in candidate perception as to the century in which works were written, but perhaps examination nerves were responsible for this. The mechanics of English expression were rather shaky in a substantial number of papers.

COMMENTS ON SPECIFIC QUESTIONS/SECTIONS

Many thanks are given to the markers whose detailed reports have informed the following:

Section I Texts and Contexts

Q1 Social conventions limit the political and domestic lives of men and women. Evaluate this statement with respect to at least one text.

26% of the cohort answered this question. There were some good responses on *Hedda*, *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Eva Luna*, and the word 'evaluate' acted as a good discriminator. Nonetheless, some candidates concentrated on the domestic lives – usually of women – and ignored the issue of political life. The best answers grouped men and women as people and demonstrated the ways in which social conventions affected the working class. The weak answers focussed on details of plots, instead of considering the question in the broader social context.

Q2 Readers are often prompted to investigate the imbalance of power in society through representations of ethnicity or race. Discuss how ethnicity or race is represented in one or more texts.

32% of the cohort answered this question. This was the most popular question of the paper. The stronger candidates related their answers to *No Sugar* and *It's Raining Mango*. Although favoured by many candidates, *Othello* seemed to encourage weak discussions, many of which enumerated illustrations of power imbalance, instead of analysing the causes of the problem. The most successful essays focussed on the ways in which the representation of race can be challenged and yet supported through the often unwitting racism within texts.

Q3 Explain how writers use class to define characters and to determine their success or failure within society. Refer to one or more texts in your answer.

13% of the cohort answered this question. *A Fringe of Leaves* and *Hedda Gabler* were the best answered texts. Good answers concentrated on contextualising the terms to determine their meaning within the fictionalised worlds. The failure to define class characterised the weakest answers, although definitions of class were sometimes seen as the major requirement of the question, and success and failure were often ignored or regarded only in the light of material goods.

Q4 Social and political conditions influence the way in which a reader constructs meaning. Discuss this in relation to one or more texts.

7% of the cohort answered this question. This question tied with the final one of the paper for the distinction of being the least popular. The best answers tended to offer post-colonial readings of texts such as *Othello*, *Remembering Babylon* and *Heart of Darkness*. The reader's context, although part of the syllabus, seems to be an area few schools have explored. Weaker candidates dwelt on the social and political conditions described in the text.

Q5 Examine how one or more texts represent cultural identity.

20% of the cohort answered this question. The most striking answers investigated cultural identity in an analysis of marginalised characters. *No Sugar*, *Remembering Babylon* and the Krote poems of Harwood featured in these responses. This very straightforward question enabled weak candidates to perform reasonably well, particularly with regard to Heaney's work.

Section II Prose Fiction

Q6 Explain how the time and place in which a novel is set influences the reader's construction of meaning. Refer to at least one novel.

9% of the cohort answered this question. *Frankenstein*, *Heart of Darkness* and *The Handmaid's Tale* appeared in the best responses, which considered not only time and place but also the reader's construction of meaning. Weaker answers commented only on setting, and some candidates were very confused about time and place in *Cloudstreet*.

Q7 There is no such thing as a 'neutral' story or narrator. Discuss how the narrator positions the reader to accept a particular reading of a text. Refer to one or more texts in your answer.

31% of the cohort answered this question – making it the second most popular question of the paper. There were good answers on *Frankenstein* and *The Handmaid's Tale*, which explained the different ways in which the narrator can position the reader. Few candidates considered third-person narrators. Poor responses were completely muddled about the terms objective and subjective and conflated the narrator with the author.

Q8 'The novel does more than tell a story. It supports a value system or it proposes some view of how life is or should be lived.' Discuss this statement as it relates to a text which you have studied.

28% of the cohort answered this question. This was an effective discriminator. The most convincing essays were able clearly to identify the value system, often relating this, and a view of how life should be lived, to *Cloudstreet*. Occasionally a persuasive response related these aspects to *The Age of Innocence*. Candidates seemed unable, however, to see that novels that challenge conventions are, in themselves, ideological. The less successful candidates addressed only one part of the question.

Q9 Writers investigate social actions and interactions through the ways in which the characters are constructed. Discuss with reference to one or more texts.

8% of the cohort answered this question. *The Well* and *It's Raining in Mango* were reference texts used by the most effective responses. These deduced that characters are constructs representing social actions and interactions. The weaker essays described characters as if they were real people.

Q10 Novels often have more than one setting. Explain the ways in which a writer uses a change of setting to achieve a specific effect or to shape particular meanings. Discuss with reference to one or more texts.

22% of the cohort answered this question. *The English Patient*, *Heart of Darkness* and *A Fringe of Leaves* were among those exhibiting a knowledge of the way in which a text's setting could be used figuratively to enhance particular meanings. Weak answers concentrated on a literal interpretation of setting.

Section III Poetry

Q11 Many poets use traditional forms and/or less structured ways to communicate their ideas. Discuss how a poet can use traditional forms or challenge them. Refer to at least two poems in your answer.

13% of the cohort answered this question. Candidates covered a good cross-section of the texts on the syllabus, with the most successful focussing on Blake, the Metaphysical poets and Harwood. The best answers demonstrated a contextual understanding as well as a good comprehension of the relationship between form and meaning, and showed how the poet can exploit this within a tradition of usage. Less successful responses simply offered a textual analysis or became confused as to whether a poet used traditional or less structured means to convey meaning in their work.

Q12 Compare how two poets use figurative language to construct meaning. Refer to at least two poems in your answer.

9% of the cohort answered this question. This was a challenging question that distinguished between candidates who understood that a comparison involved the examination of similarities and differences, and those who could only respond by dividing the question into two parts by considering two poets in succession, without cross-referencing. Few candidates seemed able to articulate just how figurative language can make meaning.

Q13 The values and beliefs of the persona influence a reader's understanding of a poem. Discuss with reference to at least two poems.

29% of the cohort answered this question. The strongest answers seemed to select Eliot, Donne, Blake and sometimes Harwood as their reference texts, explained the term persona, described the values and beliefs of the persona of a selected poem, argued that these views may or may not be shared by the poet, and then demonstrated how these views might influence the reader's understanding. The weaker candidates confused the persona with both character and poet.

Q14 The representation of a time and place in a poem helps us to understand the ideas or views presented. Discuss with reference to at least two poems.

20% of the cohort answered this question. Eliot and Judith Wright inspired the most sophisticated essays, as did the work of the Metaphysical poets and Heaney, which discussed 'time', not so much as a point in history, but on a more personal level as representing temporality, age or mortality. Poorer responses engaged on a literal level, many concentrating on 'place'. Markers generally agreed that more work needs to be done on poetic writing.

Q15 A poet's beliefs and cultural values and those of the reader influence the ways in which a person might read a poem.

27% of the cohort answered this question. Despite consternation that the final instruction in the question had inadvertently been omitted, this question was the second most popular of the section and one of the most popular of the paper. This may prove the adage that readers see what they expect to see. It also has to be a tribute to the teachers who have adequately prepared their students by exposing them to the format of past papers. The best answers often referred to Heaney, Blake and Eliot. These either suggested a range of hypothetical personal contexts or offered a variety of possible reading positions and indicated which positions would or would not be privileged.

The weakest were able to engage with the first part of the question but not the second. Perhaps more work needs to be done on reader response theory or eliminate it from the syllabus.

Section IV Drama

Q16 Playwrights invite the audience to accept or reject a character through a variety of mechanisms: dialogue, actions, lighting, costumes, music, scenery and stage directions. Refer to a play in your answer.

18% of the cohort answered this question. No Sugar, Caucasian Chalk Circle and Hedda Gabler drew the most able responses, which examined dramatic mechanisms by investigating whether or not the audience could empathise or identify with characters – especially the principal characters. The least able candidates limited their discussion to dialogue, actions and stage directions.

Q17 Plays can often confront an audience with uncomfortable situations as a way of encouraging some critical reflection on society's norms or expectations. Discuss with reference to a play.

28% of the cohort answered this question. No Sugar and Medea were referred to by the most competent candidates, who did not waste their time describing uncomfortable situations in violent detail, but analysed the reasons for playwrights choosing to confront their audiences in this way. Less able candidates preferred to focus on the discomfort of the characters, rather than the audience.

Q18 Discuss how the use of character enables a playwright to communicate differences in class, power and relationships in a play which you have studied.

30% of the cohort answered this question. The Tempest, Medea, and A View from the Bridge seemingly invited the better responses, which examined the notion of power by linking it to aspects of gender and race. Once again, less able candidates seemed not to understand the concept of class.

Q19 Discuss how the setting of a play helps a reader make meaning. Refer to one or more plays in your answer.

16% of the cohort answered this question. A View from the Bridge, No Sugar, and Arcadia seemed to encourage the most competent candidates to display their understanding that the setting of a play includes the actual design of the set, which is a vital ingredient in the process of the reader's construction of meaning. Weaker responses concentrated on a literal interpretation of place – for example, town as opposed to country.

Q20 Discuss the ways in which the audience uses its own social and political experiences and values to construct meaning from a play.

7% of the cohort answered this question. Tied in equal place with question 4 as the least popular question of the paper, this proved to be a discriminating factor in itself, for it was, in general, very well answered. The most able candidates compared likely audience responses to a play's first performance with those of an audience to contemporary productions. Othello and Friel's Translations featured in the best answers. The worst answers confused past audiences with contemporary ones.

POINTS FOR CONSIDERATION BY THE SYLLABUS COMMITTEE

The Syllabus Committee might think it timely to reconsider the actual syllabus in light of developments in the secondary sector, or at least review the range of issues in the Texts and Contexts section. Is it enough to have a large range of texts that focus study on *contemporary* areas of interest, or should the syllabus become rather more sophisticated? In addition to contemporary concerns, the syllabus could encourage a broader range of responses, in keeping with modern literary scholarship. The first step might be to drop the Texts and Contexts Section. Since these issues and concepts also have to be addressed in each of the genre sections, this fourth section simply encourages repetition of concepts and, for the unwary candidate, repetition of texts. If this section were dropped, candidates would have more time to develop detailed responses and a sustained argument. Four essays in three hours simply encourages shallow treatment.

Jill Durey
December 2001

2001 Examining Panel

Chief Examiner: Dr Jill Durey
Deputy: Dr Kathryn Trees
Third Member: Ms Rhonda Goldie

Chief Marker: Mr Roland Leach

ENGLISH LITERATURE TEE 2001 MARKING GUIDE

23 – 25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addresses the question and focuses on the key terms • Sophisticated approach; uses literary terms appropriately • Excellent knowledge of texts • Intelligent use of quotes and examples (specific details) • Constructs clear and logical argument; intellectual engagement with question.
20 – 22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addresses question clearly • Clear knowledge of texts • Good use of quotes and examples • Not as sophisticated, argument not as succinct • Expressed clearly • Good understanding of key concepts involved • All (most) of the points for 23 –25, but expression not as clear.
17 – 19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good, clear points • Generally on the question, not as developed, perhaps brief • Expression not always clear • Many good ideas, may be long-winded and not as clear and direct • Expression fair, a little general. • Has points but fails to always link their significance to question clearly • Sophisticated and well written, but loosely based on question – gets there but needs more focus and direction.
13 – 16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addresses the question, but is rather simplistic • Expressed clearly • Fair answer but drifts away from question frequently • Understanding shown but expression of ideas, argument, limited
10 – 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poorly written, some ideas on the question but too general and unfocussed • Fair/good knowledge and ideas, but no focus on question.
5 – 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor understanding of texts and question, minimal focus on question • Longish answer, very poor expression, little understanding, but has some general points.
0 – 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No understanding shown, very brief, no engagement with question • Brief (½- 1 page) with little focus or detail • Longer answer, but fails to address question, poorly expressed with no close reference to the texts or question