



## **General Certificate of Secondary Education**

### **English 3702** *Specification A*

**3702/2H Paper 2 Higher Tier**

## **Report on the Examination** *2007 examination - June series*

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*Dr Michael Cresswell Director General.*

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## GCSE English (3702)

Examiners considered this year's paper to be straightforward with accessible questions for Higher Tier candidates. There were very few rubric infringements and very little evidence of candidates running out of time. Occasionally candidates made little or no attempt to answer Section A, though this was very much the exception to the rule. Very few candidates this year chose a poem from the literature section to accompany the named poem. There was increased concern about inappropriate entry, with several examiners commenting that they had marked candidates who they believed were more suited to Foundation Tier entry and who would have benefited from the more structured questions offered by that tier in Section A.

### Section A: Reading

It was generally agreed that both questions gave candidates the opportunity to demonstrate their skills in the targeted assessment objectives, challenging the most able whilst proving accessible to candidates and the lower end of the tier entry. The specific focus on methods in both questions in Section A appeared to help candidates demonstrate their skills in "understanding and evaluating how writers use linguistic, structural and presentational devices" with many directly linking technique to meaning. Candidates appeared to be familiar with both the named poems – a welcome indicator that centres have responded to last year's message that all poems in a cluster must be studied.

Overall, there seemed to be an even distribution of choice between Question 1 and Question 2 with evidence of some centres choosing the first or second cluster *en bloc*. Some candidates selected poems from both clusters, though this was not the norm.

There continues to be increased evidence of planning in Section A and examiners cite this as the factor most likely to help students select an appropriate second poem, and produce structured and coherent responses that address the question and make relevant cross reference. Ideally, plans are brief and focused. Occasionally plans were over-elaborate and unnecessarily detailed, detracting from the time candidates then had available to answer the question. The development of purposeful planning techniques, starting with a detailed analysis of the wording of sample questions, would be a useful revision focus for centres prior to the examination. The importance of choosing a relevant second poem cannot be overstated. Centres should be aware that some candidates appear to choose the poem they wrote about in their mock exams or the poem in closest proximity to the named poem within the *Anthology*, without giving due consideration to the demands of the question.

Centres are reminded that the word "compare" is used to encourage candidates to make cross-reference, which is one aspect of AO2(iv). In some centres there appears to be an over-emphasis on comparison at the expense of other skills, with candidates repeatedly making simple links between poems, for example "there are peasants in 'What Were They Like?' and peasants in 'Night of the Scorpion'", but not developing these further. The need to compare should not override the need to examine technique and to show understanding and, at a higher level, exploration of ideas, feelings and attitudes. Candidates are not required to compare two poems step by step. A response in which the named poem is first explored, followed by an analysis of the second chosen poem with cross-reference made to the first is equally valid.

Whilst there was little evidence this year of candidates not being familiar with the named poems, examiners did report evidence of candidates making false assertions about either the poets or the poems, based on misinformation. This was particularly true of 'What Were They Like?' where a significant minority of candidates in given centres appeared to have no background knowledge of the Vietnam War or its relevance to the poem. The lack of such knowledge

inevitably hindered their ability to demonstrate sound understanding in their responses to the poem.

There was also continued concern about some candidates' inability to write about technique in a constructive and purposeful way. In some centres there was almost rote identification of features, such as simile and metaphor, but with almost no consideration given to authorial purpose or effect. Centres are reminded of the need to help candidates consider why a particular word or image has been chosen, and the impact of this specifically and within the context of the poem as a whole.

As in previous years, examiners reported some evidence of large numbers of candidates within a centre responding to questions in very similar and relatively limited ways, suggesting practised or learnt responses. Centres should be aware that candidates do best when they have open minds about the poems and the confidence to interpret them in the way that is most appropriate to the question they are answering.

### **Question 1**

Responses ranged from those that analysed a wide range of techniques used by the poets, including structure, imagery and diction and combined these with exploratory and insightful comments on culture, to those that made simple and random statements on technique (*there is a question/answer format*) and aspects of culture (*the people are poor*). Ability to comment purposefully on the unusual format of 'What Were They Like?' was often a useful discriminatory feature. Candidates at the lower end of the spectrum often became bogged down with trying to define who might be asking and answering the questions, while more able candidates were able to consider the effects of the question/answer form in adding impact to the revelations about what happened to the culture in Vietnam. There were, additionally, some delightful analyses of how the style and tone of the language of the questions differed from that of the answers, and how this impacted on ideas relating to the culture and the war.

Ability to comment on the imagery within the named poem, and its reflection on the culture, was also a useful discriminatory factor. At a simple level, candidates made generalised statements relating to the culture as being happy or joyful or peaceful whilst more able candidates investigated the cultural significance of the formalised ceremonies and the references to music and the *epic poem*. Several examiners expressed concern that some candidates in this tier did not make any reference to specific images such as the *blossom* and *buds* or the *flight of moths in moonlight*, and suggested that these candidates, though clearly able to engage with such ideas, had not been taught to do so. Others, however, commented on the close analysis of such images, the maturity of many the responses and the genuine empathy expressed therein. A common formula used in some centres is "point, evidence, explanation". Centres should be aware of the need to encourage higher tier candidates to both analyse the evidence and develop detailed comments on it in order to move up through the mark scheme descriptors.

The named poem, 'What Were They Like?', was compared with all the poems across the cluster, the most frequent choices being 'Night of the Scorpion', 'Scavengers', 'Nothing's Changed' and 'Limbo'. Where the choice had been consciously made, some very effective cross-references followed. The evocation of the past and the present was a helpful focus in consideration of 'Nothing's Changed', whereas the victimisation or suppression of a whole culture was often the common feature determining the selection of 'Limbo'. Where 'Vultures' was chosen simply because it was the choice in the mock examination, there was little effective comparison. Where it was consciously chosen, the responses were sometimes outstanding with a clear and precise focus on the historical parallels.

## Question 2

Most candidates appeared well prepared to respond to 'Search For My Tongue' with the second poem being chosen from across the cluster, 'Presents from my Aunts in Pakistan' being the most popular. Examiners were pleased to see an increase in writing about both 'This Room' and 'Love After Love', and reported a generally high level of candidate engagement where these were chosen. Where it was an active choice, 'Unrelated Incidents' provided a useful vehicle for focusing on the importance of language in forging identity, though several examiners expressed the belief that some candidates had chosen this poem simply because of its proximity to the named poem within the *Anthology*.

Nearly all candidates were able to demonstrate awareness of the key concept of the relationship between language and identity within the named poem. More able candidates, selecting 'Presents...' as their second poem, appeared to engage with the more personal tone of the poems and wrote sensitively of the internal struggles taking place and their physical representations as tongues and presents. Candidates at all levels seemed aware of the use of metaphor, though at the lower end of the entry its presence was simply identified with no exploration as to how or why it was being used. Again, examiners felt that many of these candidates could be helped to write about metaphor in a way that would enable them to show "awareness of writer's technique and purpose" in the notional C range.

Whilst many candidates wrote convincingly and with insight about the central positioning of Gujarati in the named poem, there were several who were unable to move beyond simple identification of its presence. The same candidates often became needlessly focused on line length or stanza variation, detailing the appearance of the lines or stanzas on the page but offering no explanation for this. Centres should be aware that such responses rarely move beyond "*simple comment on some aspect of presentation*" in the notional E range, and that candidates need to make valid and developed comments on the effects and/or the authorial purpose in order to gain higher marks.

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## Section B

Examiners believed that the Section B tasks facilitated lively and engaging responses. The range of questions appeared to appeal to candidates and there was a reasonable distribution of responses across the questions, with Question 3 proving least popular and Question 5, as always, being the most popular choice. Examiners remain convinced that some centres instruct their candidates to answer Question 5, though there is no evidence to suggest that they fare better by doing so. There is general agreement amongst examiners that candidates write best when they are strongly engaged by the task and that flexibility in choice of question should be encouraged.

As with last year, there was increased evidence of planning. It was evident that skills in planning had been carefully taught in some centres, with the majority of candidates practising them to good effect. It still remains the case, however, that in some centres there was almost no evidence of planning techniques having been taught. Proficient planning makes a significant difference to candidates' achievements and should be regularly taught and encouraged by centres. The same is true of editing. Two marks are awarded for writing, the first being for communication and organisation and the second for sentence structure, punctuation and spelling. Planning has a direct impact on the first of these marks, and editing has a direct impact on the second. Candidates should be encouraged to spend five minutes, as recommended on the question paper, checking and improving their written work. This would provide them with the opportunity, not only to correct errors in punctuation (particularly commas) and spelling, but also to ensure a range of sentence structures for effect. This can make a significant difference to their final mark and could, ultimately, raise their final grade.

Examiners are instructed at standardising meetings to have an open mind when considering candidates' interpretations of the tasks in Section B. Thus the animal in Question 3 could be human or mythical and the home in Question 5 could be spiritual, emotional or psychological. The candidates did not fail to deliver a wide range of interpretations to both questions, delighting and, occasionally, perplexing the examiners. Whilst **Question 3** was the least popular, it was generally chosen by candidates with a particular interest in animals and a wealth of information to impart. Examiners reported articles that showed an "astonishing breadth and depth of knowledge" on a whole range of animals, wild and domesticated, extinct and endangered. Though this was the least popular option, because of its nature it was considered by examiners to be one of the most successful tasks and a vindication of the view that candidates of all abilities write best when they have something they want to write about.

In response to **Question 5**, a significant minority of candidates chose a depressingly pedestrian route, detailing the contents and colours of each room in their house, with little use of descriptive language and even less awareness of audience. Such candidates appeared to have given no thought to the use of the word "home" in the task. Others appeared to approach description in a very mechanistic way. Several examiners reported large numbers of candidates "attaching three adjectives to every noun" and "including a simile in every second sentence". Centres should be aware that adopting a formulaic approach to descriptive writing rarely produces high-level responses. There were, however, many excellent descriptions where details of the building were interwoven with precise, witty and sensitive accounts of family life. Additionally, many candidates adopted an imaginative approach to the task, with their chosen home being the streets, their church, their mind or indeed the earth, the latter perhaps inspired by the last line of *Hurricane Hits England*.

**Question 4** provided candidates with an opportunity to "hit back" and many examiners commented on the forcefulness with which they did so. Many drew on personal experience to attack the stereotype of youth, and references to "chavs" were in abundance. On the whole, the letters were well structured and developed with the majority of candidates writing for audience and demonstrating an appropriate tone and level of formality.

**Question 6** enabled candidates to draw on personal experience and there were many delightful and sometimes very moving responses to this task. Some candidates wrote about personal triumphs, friendships made and lost, holidays and school memories. Others described, with lucidity and honesty, bereavements, family break-ups and illnesses. A narrative approach was often adopted and this was regarded as a totally valid response to the task. Occasionally, candidates would separate their explanation from their description but more commonly the two were closely interwoven. Examiners reported not only on the range of subject matter covered in response to this question but also on the strong sense of audience and the high level of maturity demonstrated by many of the candidates, particularly those who could cogently analyse the effect of the experience on their lives.