



General Certificate of Education

English Language 6706 *Specification B*

ENB5 **Editorial Writing**

Report on the Examination *2007 examination - January series*

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Question 1 The Gladiator's Story

This was a popular question and most candidates scored some success, even if only to transpose some simplified material into a first person account. The material had to be re-written to meet the needs of a younger audience. On the whole, candidates appreciated that this was the case and wrote accordingly. Many, however, were too concerned to launch into the personal account without incorporating historical and cultural information. Young readers know about Romans but need contextualising background. The questions "When, where and why?" were all too often left unanswered.

The best scripts showed an ability to write an interesting and accessible account of life as a gladiator, in the voice of a credible and engaging persona, matched to the profile of gladiators as featured in the sources. These good scripts also took a broader view, examining social and personal issues. As there were no leads from historical sources, showing the perceptions and reactions of real life gladiators, this task was not so straightforward and many candidates produced a bland and pedestrian catalogue of events. There was some personal background as a young man, as a professional fighter and as a retired celebrity but there was little else. Many poor scripts were unreasonably abbreviated, dealing only with origins, training and the arena experience. The characters created did not carry conviction. Attempts to be lively were welcome but attempts to be funny usually misfired. There were a number of seriously inclined scripts which achieved considerable depth as personal memoirs. There was a good balance of exciting times recalled and historical data. Young readers could learn about weapons, the games, the clothes, the rewards etc often helpfully integrated with modest amounts of Latin.

Narrative skills as regards the recounting of events were relatively rare. Characterisation was better attempted and it was interesting to note that no candidate created a monster. Many scripts depicted the most sensitive set of gladiators you have ever met. Aware of danger, trusting in the gods, regretful of gratuitous violence, they fought because they had to. Fair-minded to the end, they dutifully mourned dead opponents.

In their commentaries, a number of candidates explained why they omitted explicit reference to violence and sexual misdemeanours. It was reasonable to adapt the more unpleasant aspects of violent combat and to resist the temptation for the frankly salacious but the topics had to be handled. The culture, attitudes and values of Rome were very different from our own. The ambivalence surrounding these gladiators – one minute they were pin-up boys and the next minute they were undesirable, whether as neighbours, friends or civic figures – needed to be addressed appropriately.

Question 2 Web Pages

The very best answers showed complete control of the sources by adapting them to a very complex web form, interrelating parts of the text with links to further detail and other areas of interest, including pictures which at the click of a link had sound and movement, while at the same time creating an engaging tone and focusing on those areas likely to fascinate. Most, of course, achieved only some of these successful strategies. Many texts began with a lively homepage then sank back into the more mundane voices of the sources. Many used only the most limited web possibilities with a link at the end of each section to the next, or back sometimes to previous ones. These tended, too, to section up the material in the obvious way with prosaic headings and sections on background, training, the fight, social status, death. The main flaw was to present the material as an illustrated book with several pages. There might have been a problem with candidates using only sparse material as this was “to introduce”, but this proved not to be the case. Many showed only a limited ability to select from and summarise the sources, shadowing closely, for example, Text A and including all the boring details of the history.

Question 3 Fair Trade Talks

This was the most popular choice of the two tasks on the Fair Trade material, and provided some remarkable scripts. It was a difficult task to adapt the sources from written to spoken mode, to make material suitable for an educated adult audience suitable for children, but many candidates did so with remarkable success. They explained the difficult concepts clearly in a voice not too close to, not too far removed from the audience, serious when need be and lighter when the subject allowed, used analogies related to the audience interests, constantly drew the audience into the argument, maintained the necessary logical progression, summarising what had come before and signposting what was to come, and skilfully linked the talk to visual aids, suitably chosen, often adapted. Some constructed their own visual aids from the sources. Less successful scripts pitched the language too high remaining too close to the sources, and using visual aids like the graph on page 17, the bar chart on page 19 without explanation. They found it difficult, too, to maintain a logical progression. Other scripts pitched the language too low, treating the audience as if they were primary school children, simplifying ideas and points to a degree that would patronise, and probably speaking very slowly. It was a misjudgement to adopt too light a tone on serious issues, and the speaker who gave the presentation dressed as a banana would be unlikely to get across the charity’s serious message; similarly the speakers who tried to speak to the children in their own idiolect were unlikely to convey the necessary authority or degree of seriousness. Many speakers opened up with the *Good morning, children... louder I can’t hear you* gambit, which might have been successful but the opening which sticks in the mind is the speaker who held up two bananas, and said: *Here are two bananas. Can anyone tell me why one is differentThis one is a magic banana because it is a Fair Trade banana and has the power to create a better life for people all over the world.* Most scripts used case studies such as that of Vitelio Menza to enhance the argument effectively. Completely misjudged, though, were the two speakers who were conducting a comedy routine like Ant and Dec; when told by his partner of the child with the huge head, the second character burst out laughing and said: *Well that’s what you get from eating too many bananas.* Less offensive, but perhaps still inappropriate was the strategy of creating a video clip of the deformed baby.

Question 4 Display Boards

This proved not to be a very popular choice, and those who chose it probably did so for the wrong reasons, giving too much attention to the visual to the neglect of the language aspects. The best answers began with some definition of the terms and went on to discuss the need for fair trade, how it was already making a difference to the third world, and how, if they wished, the general public might be part of the movement. The difficult language of the sources was carefully adapted and represented in a logical form carefully signposted to guide the reader. They avoided too much information, stretches of dense text, and if they chose illustrations from the sources like the table of fair trade shops on page 13, they were careful to explain the significance. Popular divisions of the boards were: *What Is Fair Trade and Why Do We Need It? What has Fair Trade Achieved? What's Still To Be Done?* Those who gave too much attention to the visual tended to lift material from the sources or if they changed it at all, simply pushed into a shape, bananas were popular, or created the endless bullet points which were popular in this task. These often looked good, but made little sense to anyone unless they knew the detail behind the selected snippets.

In the main, this task resulted in the least accomplished scripts. Less successful candidates forced vast tracks of information onto display boards. Some did not even bother to segment long sections of copy/shadow. Some knew a lot about fair trade but very little about reading styles, eye appeal or necks. This is an art like any other. Without an understanding of how the medium works it was a poor choice for a number of candidates. They were unable to show any skills in summary. They did not use appropriate grammatical structures. There was some useful reduction of information into bullet-point format but it often assumed the tone and appearance of an Ofsted memo.

Commentaries

These were better than last year and I believe there is an overall improvement in the approach. They seem to be getting shorter and more focused, with fewer trawling painstakingly through every aspect of language they can recognise in a text. The most successful candidates were those who were more able to select the significant aspects in their texts, making points by providing examples where appropriate, or expanding and explaining their comment as was necessary. They went beyond the simple level of understanding, to discuss on a more complex level difficult concepts such as varying tone, the ways a relationship between a reader and a writer is established and sustained, internal organisation.

In question one the focus was the establishment of a character, the language requirements for the audience, the structure of the narrative where appropriate, the omission of areas that were unsuitable, the necessity to weave in information in a palatable way. Question two commentaries tended to discuss web features without candidates seeming to know much about how language should be used for the genre, though many did wrongly think they had suited a general audience by including simple bits and pictures for the children and more difficult text for adults; this simple view of language often found its way into question four, too. Question three commentaries selected structure, the relationship with audience, the way language was changed to make it listenable to and to suit the audience; even when the language was far too complex the candidate usually found one example of how a difficult term had been simplified.

There are fewer checklists. I was bewildered by a whole centre who told me that they were either applying, or were unable to apply, the 'problem, explanation and resolution' framework.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.