



GCSE

English Language

8700/1: Explorations In Creative Reading and Writing

Report on the examination

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Summary

Extract and Image

The extract was from 'The Glass House' by Eve Chase and followed the struggles of Rita in an uncomfortable situation arriving at a new setting. The extract appeared to be easily accessible for the cohort. It covered familiar circumstances of struggling with a change in circumstances and feelings of disappointment and anxiety. Students were able to access the language and were able to respond with engagement to the questions. This was the same with the writing section, where the image of a car travelling along a dark road prompted many to choose the narrative option about a journey. The description was also easily accessible - writing about a forest.

Overall performance compared to November 2023

The mean percentage dropped slightly, but there were increases in the mean mark across Q1, Q4 and Q5 AO6. The first four lines used for Q1 posed very few difficulties for the students, with an increase in the mean mark. The statement for Q4 enabled students to engage with both halves and there was a noticeable improvement in confidence. In question 5, AO6, previous advice about paragraphing, sentence demarcation and control of punctuation appears to have been applied.

Individual questions

Areas where students excelled

Question 1 enabled over 97% to gain four marks. It was possible to gain 4 marks in a variety of ways even across two statements. There were far fewer statements taken from outside of the given lines and fewer instances of unnecessary inferences clouding the answers. Students appeared more secure in using the stem of the question ‘Rita was’ or ‘Rita thinks’ to focus their statements.

Question 4 presented two widely accessible ideas – that ‘being a Nanny was obviously Rita’s dream’ and that ‘her experience is becoming a total nightmare.’ Students selected a range of textual references to support their arguments. Popular choices were ‘longingly’ and the references to the ‘coin-gobbling electricity meter’ from her Nan’s bungalow and the hopes of ‘a bedroom of her own, with a desk and a shelf, perhaps a view of the churning, thrilling city.’ Many students understood the desire for a more comfortable and exciting life. Some students discussed the notion of a ‘perfect’ family from a fairy story – using the reference to the ‘Darlings in Peter Pan.’ There were a few answers that linked the Darlings, ‘the fluttery bird-like hands’ and the ‘sugar-white walls’ as ‘perfect’ but also unrealistic. These students explained that fairy stories were often darker in theme and often include disappointment and sadness. Some answers, which interrogated the words ‘total’ and ‘obviously,’ became perceptive in their analysis, writing a more critical view of the statement.

There were other perceptive readings of the statement and extract. Some answers discussed the notion of a dream and whether it was truly ‘being a Nanny’ that Rita wanted. The desire to belong, to be part of a family, to find the warmth she appeared to lose with the loss of her mother, were engaging arguments. A few students were able to link the loss of her mother to the accident and the ‘knowledge of quite how hard a tree trunk is when hit at fifty miles an hour.’ It was evident that students engaged with Rita’s role and how she was suppressing her feelings in front of the children. How the ‘nightmare’ was unfolding was sometimes discussed in more successful answers, as was the contrast between the London house and Foxcote Manor.

The idea of a ‘total nightmare’ was successfully interpreted by a few as not yet complete. The fact that Rita had only just arrived at Foxcote Manor indicated that this was only beginning and that there was a sense of foreboding.

The discussion of writer’s methods showed greater confidence this year and the organisation of the arguments was also improved.

Question 5 enabled many students to engage with either task. There were many engaging journeys for the narrative task. There were some successful responses that focused on an event and its immediate aftermath – such as a hit and run or a collision with an animal. Other successful responses wrote the journey as a reaction to a life changing event, such as the loss of a loved one. A memorable response had the jacket of their loved one on the passenger seat, standing in for the journey and for one-sided conversation. Relationship break-ups, travelling to visit elderly relatives and imagining a reunion (which became disappointing) were each effective approaches to the task. Journeys into space, a final journey to a cemetery,

journeys featuring annoying siblings or soul-crushing journeys to home furnishing stores were all well-received by examiners. Having a framework with which to shape the journey and then the chosen event as part of that journey, often worked well. There was a noticeable increase in planning these responses, which often provides more success with the response.

Forests, for the descriptive task, had an environmental message in some of the more successful answers. The fading of habitat, the destruction of an eco-system, the sense of what had been and now had been lost enabled some students to explore the setting with an overarching theme. Some forests held secrets from the past, such as a lost civilisation or treasure. One memorable response focused on a solitary bee as it collected pollen. There were animals, some mythical, which emerged and then retreated, some long-forgotten routes to hidden valleys and caves. More successful responses described a specific forest – even if it were one from their imagination. These forests had something interesting about them. It is important to note however, that the reader needs to be guided through a description; some students aim for more surreal descriptions, and these can become confusing very quickly.

Areas where students struggled

Misunderstanding of the extract was evident across **Questions 2 to 4**. Some students confused Rita and Jeannie, especially when it came to Jeannie crying near the end. There was also confusion about which house had had the fire and whose blouse smelt of smoke.

Question 2 had a rich variety of language choices. Popular choices were ‘tall, rusting gate,’ ‘wrecked beauty,’ ‘like a snapped spine’ and ‘chimneys tilt at odd angles.’ There is still a noticeable number of students who are using longer quotations but not then focusing on individual words or short phrases. To write about longer quotations is to drift into responding to the content, not specific use of language. Some students limited their success by choosing words or phrases that were less descriptive, such as writing about ‘gate’ rather than the preceding adjectives. When there are so many engaging choices, choosing references that have a number of inferences in line with the context of the extract, will be more successful.

More challenging language was tackled, which was pleasing to see, but these more difficult images needed more careful unpicking – by focusing on short phrases or individual words. The simile ‘erupts from the undergrowth, as if a geological heave has lifted it from the woodland floor’ prompted some students to discuss volcanic eruptions, forgetting though that this was not a literal event. ‘The old house’s windows blink drunkenly in the evening sunlight’ was one which some students tackled, but less successfully. Often the focus was ‘drunkenly’ but without ‘blink’ so inaccurate points about staggering and unconsciousness were made.

As has been mentioned before, ‘a lot about a little’ remains a useful approach to discussing language for the AO2. Unpacking a few ideas about an individual word or phrase is often more successful than one sentence each across several ideas.

Question 3 presented more confidence in many answers, but was also answered with shorter responses. There appeared to be wider identification and use of structural features. Although some students limit themselves to writing a simple overview of the extract, others were able to link features across the text. This was the question that had the highest number of non-attempted answers.

Some students noted the use of contrast between the London house and Foxcote Manor – including Rita’s arrival having contrasting emotions. Many students identified the flashback of Rita’s life in Torquay and London, but were not able to explain its effect. Some students noted that Rita was aware of Jeannie’s doubts at the end, but confused her excitement for London with her disappointment at the end.

There were fewer speculative comments about the length of sentences and paragraphs. A better focus for the use of syntax would always be ‘Why that sentence? Why there?’

Some successful answers discussed the structure of the extract using the adverbs of place or time. This enabled specific focus on the structural shifts and enabled better navigation of Rita’s experiences as a nanny. Other successful answers considered the ending and discussed what had developed or changed from the start.

Many answers were very general in their use of textual references. This can be limiting as the response could be about any extract. The use of line numbers can be helpful, but can also restrict precise explanation of the event and its structural significance.

The tasks for **Question 5** were readily answered, but less successful answers continue to write a fast-paced plot which can only allow superficial details. It can be useful to remind students that instead of a whole narrative, complete with exposition and resolution, focusing on an event is often easier to control. Journeys, which followed the events across an entire day, tended to be less engaging.

Many descriptions wrote about the typical features of a forest, such as trees, leaves, animals, rivers and waterfalls. Although these can be interesting features, many descriptions included all of these and therefore none of them were developed into being unusual or interesting. The inclusion of each of the five senses continues as a popular approach but is often formulaic and does not enable much beyond a list of ideas. Some descriptions become a list of ideas without a sense of structure. If the paragraphs could be re-ordered without interrupting the individual ideas, then the structure is haphazard. Having control over the sequence and applying ideas from **Question 3** could be a useful approach.

Further support

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