



GCSE English Language

8700/1

Report on the Examination

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Summary

Overall performance compared to last year

The extract was from 'Reunion' by Fred Uhlman and introduces a new and aristocratic boy to a class of working-class students. There were increases in attainment across all questions and students clearly engaged with the extract and the writing prompts. The extract was easily accessible with a very familiar setting and situation – meeting a new student and a potential new friend. Students accessed the language without any apparent difficulty and there was real engagement with the new boy and the reaction of his new teacher and classmates. The image of a classroom enabled many students to write about stifling classrooms or classrooms that needed some investment. The story prompt to write a story called 'The Newcomer' led many to engage with their own version of a new student in class, but others to extend to other types of newcomer.

Areas where students excelled

- Exploring language using metaphorical inferences, for example in Question 2 linking 'condemned' with being imprisoned and powerless.
- Improved confidence with showing how structure changes across sections of the extract in Question 3.
- Many more successful answers noticed that the first line indicated a structural shift and indicated the importance of the event.
- Greater clarity in arguing agreement or disagreement with the statement for Question 4 – more evidence of explaining one's point of view and linking together quotations.
- More focus on more developed episodes rather than long narratives, the latter often being superficial.
- Creating a clear atmosphere in the description.

Areas where students struggled

- Discussing imagery on a very literal level e.g. 'a poor man's smell' showing that he was 'smelly' for Question 2.
- Noting the structural shifts for Question 3 but not making any comment on what each one helped the reader to understand.
- In Question 4, some students were distracted by issues such as social class and the notion of wealth. Some students lost sight of the extract and instead were discussing issues away from the evidence in the extract.
- Rewriting the extract for Question 5 verbatim
- Using the extract as a prompt but with very limited changes e.g. rewritten almost verbatim but with a shift in the narrator's gender

Assessment objectives

AO	Common student errors
<p>AO1</p> <p>Identify and interpret explicit and implicit information and ideas. Select and synthesise evidence from different texts.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confusing the colours in the extract and to what they referred • Fragmentary answers which did not contain enough information to be pertinent to the prompt • Using the introductory information for the extract from which to draw answers
<p>AO2</p> <p>Explain, comment on and analyse how writers use language and structure to achieve effects and influence readers, using relevant subject terminology to support their views.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selection of whole phrases or sentences without isolating a specific linguistic item for analysis • Copying large sections of the text • Focusing on the literal meaning of imagery • Identifying the beginning, middle and end but without any comment on the effect of those details at that point in the text • Lack of comment on the changes across the whole extract e.g. the ending developing from/different to the beginning.
<p>AO4</p> <p>Evaluate texts critically and support this with appropriate textual references.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being distracted by the wider issues such as social class and leaving the extract behind • Labelling the newcomer as 'posh' but without explaining what that means in the context of the extract • Seeing the image of 'like a ghost' as an indicator that the newcomer was supernatural – rather than seeing this as a description of the boys' amazement • Using long quotations but with very little discussion; using the quotations as both evidence and explanation

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Missing opportunities to use language analysis as part of their analysis
<p>A05</p> <p>Communicate clearly, effectively and imaginatively, selecting and adapting tone, style and register for different forms, purposes and audiences. Organise information and ideas, using structural and grammatical features to support coherence and cohesion of texts.</p>	<p>Narrative:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using the extract almost entirely as printed as their own answer Moving too quickly through the details of their narrative so they are only superficial <p>Description:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Describing only what is seen in the image Making reference to the image - 'In the image I can see..', which limits the imagination
<p>A06</p> <p>Use a range of vocabulary and sentence structures for clarity, purpose and effect, with accurate spelling and punctuation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A lack of paragraphing Handwriting which suggested that the use of a word processor would have been beneficial Insecure use of tense and therefore a swapping between tenses which leads to confusion

Individual questions

Question 1

Read again the first part of the source from lines 1 to 6.
List four things about the classroom from this part of the source.

What students did well

The average mark rose to 3.95 for this question indicating the accessibility of this question. Answers were written with precision and showed accurate selection of details. Popular answers were the condition of the floor and walls, as well as the coats and snow puddles and heavy benches. Few students wrote outside of the given lines.

Common misunderstandings

There were few misunderstandings, as indicated by the mean mark. However, some students struggled with what the narrator could see ('the backs of my school mates') and what happened in the classroom ('he came into my life in February 1932'). A few students used the introductory information, in the box above the extract, as a source of information.

Question 2

Look in detail at this extract from lines 7 to 15 of the source.

I can still hear the tired, disillusioned voice of Herr Zimmermann, who was condemned to teaching for life and had accepted his fate with sad resignation. He was a yellow-faced man, whose hair, moustache and sharply pointed beard were all tinged with grey. He looked out at the world through glasses on the tip of his nose with the expression of a mongrel dog in search of food. Though he was probably not more than fifty years old, to us he seemed to be eighty. We despised him because he was kind and gentle and because he had a poor man's smell – his two-roomed flat probably had no bath – and he was dressed in a much patched, shiny, greenish suit which he wore during the autumn and the long, winter months (he had a second suit for spring and summer).

How does the writer use language here to describe the teacher ?

What students did well

- Discussing 'disillusioned' as an indicator of losing energy. Some students were able to link this to a sense of hopelessness.
- Drawing together linguistic items into a semantic field of powerlessness or hopelessness.
- Discussing the metaphor of a dog 'in search of food' - where the teacher was looking for scraps in his job to keep him going until the next day

Common misunderstandings

- Selecting unhelpful language that was often concrete e.g. that he had a beard, wore glasses suggested that he did not shave (or could not afford to shave), had poor eyesight which meant that he was old
- Limiting discussion to one sentence, or repetitive sentences of explanation. Ideas that were pertinent were left unexplored and there were missed opportunities for more marks
- Repeating the quotation in the same or very similar words adding no, or very limited, understanding.
- Some students focused on his suit being 'shiny' as an indicator of the suit being 'fancy' and so not an indicator of being more affluent. They also read the second suit as being well paid as he could afford another suit.

Question 3

This text is from the beginning of a novel.

How has the writer structured the text to interest you as a reader?

What students did well

Students appeared to show more confidence with the structural features that they selected and again there was an increase in the mean mark to 2.48 from 2.36 last November.

- Stronger answers understood the contrast between the newcomer and the rest of the class. They were able to build on the idea that across the text there were clues that built up to his identity at the end of the extract.
- They were also able to draw a link from the shabby classroom in the first paragraph to the teacher in the second making the newcomer seem even more out of place.
- The indication of a flashback in the first line drew more able students to see this as a pivotal moment in time.
- The contrast in appearance between the newcomer and the other boys in the class drew some stronger comments on how this affected the reader's understanding
- The character of the teacher and his changing behaviour across the text engaged more confident students.

Common misunderstandings

- Less able students did not see the flashback and instead gave an overview of the text's beginning, middle and end with little understanding of the effects of the features – such as zooming in or a 'shift'.
- There were students who wanted to see a cyclical structure or an anti-climax where there was none.
- Some students noticed that the newcomer was very different to the other boys, but did not discuss the use of contrast
- Some students focused on the relationship between the newcomer and the narrator and although the friendship, or romance as some students read it, is clearly important, the event of his arrival is the focus of the extract.

Question 4

Focus this part of your answer on the second part of the source, from line 20 to the end. A student said, 'the new boy is clearly very different from the rest of the students and the writer suggests that everything about him is better than everybody else.'
To what extent do you agree ?

What students did well

- Students engaged well with these ideas and there were students who argued that being wealthy did not make you a better person, which often boosted Level 2 answers in particular.
- The mean mark increased from 6.2 to 7.3 and it was evident in the lengthier responses that students had plenty to comment upon.
- Stronger answers were able to select a range of evidence and commented on this to build an argument.
- More able students were able to discuss the newcomer's appearance but also his demeanour – they discussed his elegance, his natural confidence and the fact that he was very proud of his name and lineage.
- Some students were able to explore the clothes of the new boy and that these were indicative not just of wealth, but of status. This was then matched to his actions when he stands and 'announces' his name and place of birth – indicating pride as well as self-importance taken from his parents.
- A few students noticed that the newcomer did not react to the surroundings, which must have been a contrast to those to which he was accustomed. They linked this to having good manners, as well as having self-control and the elevated confidence to navigate lowly surroundings
- There were some who mentioned his poise and manners as well as the idea that his parents had dressed him as a figure of authority.
- There were some very good comments about the deference that the teacher shows and the almost bow that he decides not to do. More able students commented that the teacher checks his behaviour – measuring his reaction to the new boy, wanting so much to get it right.
- They were also able to comment on him coming down from his plinth - 'stepped down from his desk' - lowering himself, literally and metaphorically, to serve the new boy.

Common misunderstandings

- Some students wanted to argue that he was not different but was only dressed in expensive clothes. Arguing to disagree when there is little evidence to support it, does hinder some students.
- The simile 'we stared at him like we had seen a ghost' led some students to focus on the idea of the supernatural. The reaction of the boys – surprise, amazement – is what is being described here.

Question 5

0 5 Your school newspaper is running a creative writing competition. The best entries will be published.

Either

Write a description of a classroom, as suggested by this picture:



or

Write a story called 'The Newcomer'.

(24 marks for content and organisation
16 marks for technical accuracy)
[40 marks]

What students did well

Students engaged well with the familiar setting of a classroom, but also with the introduction of a new class member.

- For the narrative, many answers showed engagement with the idea of a newcomer. Many wrote their own version of a new student in school - some were love stories, some were students who others befriended. There were newcomers as new babies to a family, a new competitor in a sporting context and a new member of a group of animals. Creative ideas also included being the new drummer in a band, taking an initiation ceremony to become a pirate, having to pass a test to be part of a magic kingdom.

- Many students were able to relate the situation to a hobby they enjoy such as being a new team mate in a football/rugby team. Some were the new player on the team and cemented their place winning by scoring the final goal. Others introduced the idea of rivalry from an existing member of the team versus the newcomer. This led some students to attain more highly as they were able to explore details relating to a theme. There were many engaging responses to this across the levels where it was obvious that students had more ideas than only a school setting.
- For the description, many students related their own classroom experiences to the image, and these were often engaging and appropriately humorous.
- More successful answers often built up the atmosphere rather than simply stating what, or who, was in the classroom.
- Some responses were set in the past and this enabled more engagement with objects such as slate and chalk, a fire in the corner and the rote learning of the students. When students draw upon an historical period in which they have an interest, this can lift their answer.
- There appeared to be more careful use of vocabulary and fewer examples of contrived language.

Common misunderstandings

- Students who use the extract as a scaffold for their Question 5 response can find it difficult to add their own ideas in any creditable manner. There were responses where the structure and events were identical to that of the extract. Examiners work hard to see the original ideas added by the student, but there were some that were verbatim and others that were almost verbatim. Changing the gender, the colours of the walls or floors, the names of the characters are only superficial aspects of the narrative and are likely to attain in Level 1.
- Some responses written in the first person, did not make it clear that they were the newcomer.
- Listing the details in the image for the description tends to be very limiting. Using features of the image, but then adding further detail from the imagination, can be more successful.

Further support

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