

CARIBBEAN EXAMINATIONS COUNCIL

**REPORT ON CANDIDATES' WORK IN THE
SECONDARY EDUCATION CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION**

JANUARY 2011

**ENGLISH B
GENERAL PROFICIENCY**

**Copyright © 2011 Caribbean Examinations Council
St Michael, Barbados
All rights reserved.**

GENERAL COMMENTS

The historic first January sitting of the English B examination exposed a diverse range of responses from a population of candidates that ranged from 11–59 years. Candidates' responses suggested that they enjoyed the encounter with set texts and responded with the range of organizational thinking styles which they either naturally developed or were schooled into.

The Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) Examination in English B consists of two components — Paper 01 and Paper 02. Paper 01 consists of three compulsory questions, one from each mode of writing — Drama, Poetry and Prose Fiction. These modes of writing are the content profiles which form the basis for candidates' assessment. In each question, candidates are required to give approximately three to five short answers. Fifteen marks are allocated for each question for a total of 45 marks. Paper 01 contributes 30 per cent to the examination.

Paper 02 consists of ten optional extended essay questions, arranged under three sections, which correspond to the modes of writing and profiles assessed. Candidates are required to answer one question from this section.

Section A

Drama consists of four Type A questions. These are questions which are set on specific texts. Two questions are set on each drama text. Candidates are required to answer one question from this section.

Section B

Poetry consists of two Type B questions. These are questions of comparison. Candidates are required to study 20 poems which are specified in the syllabus. For one of the questions, Question 5, the poems to be used are specified by the examiner. However, for the second question, Question 6, candidates must choose two appropriate poems from which they have studied to answer the question set. Candidates are required to answer one question from this section.

Section C

Prose Fiction consists of four Type B questions. Candidates are required to study two West Indian and two non-West Indian novels in English. These texts are specified in the syllabus. Candidates must answer one question.

Each question in Paper 02 is worth 35 marks for a total of 105. Paper 02 contributes 70 per cent to the examination.

The overall performance in the January 2011 English B examination was quite satisfactory and it is envisaged that performance will improve even further as candidates' performance on Profile 2 — Poetry — improves.

DETAILED COMMENTS

Paper 01 – Short Answer

Paper 01 assesses the following skills:

- i) Comprehension
- ii) Awareness of the writer's craft (that is, the ability to say how a writer/poet achieves a given effect)

Candidates are required to demonstrate the following:

- Analysis, which here takes the form of reducing a passage to its verbal constituents (for example, imagery, rhythm, tone or mood, sound of words) and the ability to say how these elements function effectively in the passage.
- Knowledge of dramatic devices such as stage directions and props
- Awareness of the relationship between action and motive
- Awareness of the interaction among characters

Candidates' performance in Paper 01 was good. Overall, the mean performance in Profile 1, Drama, was 29.25; in Profile 2, Poetry, 20.29; and Profile 3, Prose Fiction, 22.98. The weakest performance was in Poetry.

Candidates demonstrated an excellent grasp of the principles of literary appreciation and added their personal and heartfelt responses to the excerpts/texts in the three genres. The personal involvement from candidates was evident in their responses which seemed to range from precocious to a mature analysis of the texts and the questions.

Question 1

Overall the question was handled well and quite a few candidates earned full marks. Generally, the more able candidates were able to access marks which ranged from 11 to 15 (15 marks being the maximum). Those who did not achieve maximum score either misinterpreted the question or did not give full enough responses. Candidates are encouraged to read extracts in their entirety instead of focusing on one or two words to base their responses.

Most of the candidates were able to earn one of the two marks allocated to Part (a). This question assessed candidates' comprehension of the incident taking place. There was some misinterpretation. Some candidates saw the event as a political rally or a protest (making reference to words like 'minister' and 'commissioner'). Others chose to highlight and interpret the word 'gay' as having homosexual connotations or that there was just a march, missing the carnival-like event.

Part (b), which assessed candidates understanding of the use of dramatic techniques, produced some very good responses. However, like Part (a), there was evidence of misinterpretation. For example, Brock's statement about getting an exorcist or using bullets was taken to mean that he was not in favour of the tramping. Some candidates gave only one and not two ways in which the playwright showed that Brock does not share the view of the others. Others missed the dramatic technique of the stage device. They indicated, for example, that Brock leaves the stage. There were some candidates who merely quoted lines from the extract instead of using the lines to show the manifestation.

Part (c) (i) required candidates to use the words 'how undignified' to show what they revealed about Stickwell's attitude. This part of the question was not well done. Some candidates responded to the behaviour of Stickwell to the marchers instead of using Stickwell's words to evaluate or assess his attitude to the festivity of the marchers. Others tried to define the word 'undignified'. The better prepared candidates were awarded full marks for accurately indicating that Stickwell was being condescending, snobbish and was generally disgusted by the

actions of the Tramping Man and his supporters. The second part of this question, (c) (ii), was reasonably well done, although there was evidence of misinterpretation, possibly because candidates did not understand the word 'imply'. The expected response for this question required candidates to capture the fact that Stickwell did not trust Brock and that he was not surprised by his action. There was some confusion in the assumption candidates made that he was making reference to the Minister, when he was actually speaking about Brock. Some candidates made statements like, 'He told the Minister not to go to the dance, but he would not listen.' In a few instances, candidates felt that Brock was the same person as the minister.

Part (d) (i) required candidates to state one difference between the government officials and the Tramping Man and his supporters. Generally, responses should have suggested that the government officials seemed stiff and unmoved by the music, whereas the Tramping Man and his supporters seemed alive and energetic. One of the major areas of misinterpretation for Part (d) (i) was that instead of showing the difference between the government officials and the Tramping Man, candidates looked at differences among the government officials and their positions. Part (d) (ii) required candidates to show how the playwright emphasizes the difference identified in Part (d) (i). Expected responses should have mentioned the dynamics between the on-stage versus off-stage activities (the stiff irrational abuse by officialdom versus the offstage energized, joyous, natural movement led or influenced by the Tramping Man). Many candidates repeated material mentioned in Part (d) (i) instead of looking at the importance of saying **how** or looking at the playwright's method (technique) of differentiating between both groups and were therefore unable to access the marks awarded for this question.

Part (e) was a reader-response item. The onus was on the candidates to take a position then provide textual evidence to support the position taken. Many candidates scored full marks as they were able to support their claim. However, some candidates did not understand the meaning of the word 'justified' and proceeded to contradict themselves. For example, they said the reasons for the arrest were justified yet they showed why it was not right for the Tramping Man to be arrested. Others restated lines to support the position taken.

Question 2

For Question 2, Poetry, candidates seemed to identify with the issue of aging. Part (a) was fairly well done as most candidates understood the image being portrayed. Many candidates saw the image of the old man but few went further to see other things, for example, alone, quiet, hunched.

Part (b), which assessed poetic technique, required candidates to identify the literary device and comment on the effectiveness of it. Some candidates discussed the effectiveness of the device without identifying it and so could not be awarded full marks. Additionally, although the explanatory note said what *Guardian* was, some candidates creatively inferred it was a person. Effective responses identified the device as either metaphor or personification and suggested how the 'drooling' captured the image of the newspaper slipping from Pa's grasp and the ways in which the falling newspaper and Pa's drooling are similar.

Part (c) though not literary, posed some amount of difficulty for some candidates who merely connected Pa's 'silent rage' to his quiet surroundings or the fact that he is old. However, insightful responses made reference to line 5 'how seldom he laughed in those days' suggesting that Pa is angry now as he reflects that when he was young he did not really enjoy himself; Pa resents his own physical helplessness (evidence — his hands are no longer steady); 'Pa can no longer control his thoughts'(line 14), among others.

Most candidates managed reasonable responses to Part (d) (i), which asked for two impressions of Pa. Some of the responses which were awarded full marks included: Pa was a role model; one who portrays positive attributes; other descriptors such as unflinching, solid, dependable, loyal, focused, and faithful. Part (d) (ii), however, posed a challenge for candidates who, instead of giving two words or phrases to support the impressions in (d) (i),

quoted entire sentences. Ideal responses mentioned ‘steady hands’; ‘vices he declined’ for phrases and ‘sacrifice’, and ‘anchored’ for words to support their claim.

Part (e) was a reader-response item which proved challenging for those who said that the title was inappropriate. A few candidates did not commit but their responses pointed to either a positive or negative leaning. Candidates should be trained to take a position and to defend such a position.

Question 3

Overall, candidates’ responses indicated that they found the passage was manageable and interesting and within their experience. Part (a), which required candidates to provide two reasons why the narrator was upset was well done and candidates who did not earn full marks tended to ignore the instructions to confine their responses to paragraph one. It is important that candidates read the questions carefully to ensure that they provide the requirements of the question and so improve their ability to earn full marks.

For Part (b), candidates were required to identify the literary device in a given phrase and comment on the effectiveness of it. Some candidates did not name a device (in this case, metaphor) and others named incorrect devices and so did not earn the one mark for this part of the question. Additionally, some only attempted an explanation of the phrase and many did not know what ‘jellyfish’ was. Those candidates who did justice to the question mentioned the mother’s helpless shaking as she laughs and how the narrator feels like her mother is stinging her by not paying her any attention.

Part (c), which assessed candidates’ knowledge of irony was not well done. Many candidates did not identify the irony (located within the four lines given) or explain it. A complete response would have entailed the candidates explaining the nature of the contrast, that is, what was expected by the narrator (comfort, love, affection) versus what was received (being ignored by her mother) when she went home.

Part (d) was fairly well handled. Candidates were required to indicate how the narrator felt after her mother confirmed she had eaten breadfruit and to support the response given. Once candidates identified the feelings, for example, that the narrator felt betrayed by her mother/ was distrustful of her mother/ was repulsed by her mother, they were able to supply the necessary evidence and were able to earn full marks. Responses which captured the crocodile image; the mother’s laughter; or the mother being half in and half out the door got full marks. On the other hand, some candidates had difficulty providing supporting evidence. Some candidates identified the feeling **before** and not **after** as indicated in the question. Others did not identify the feelings but gave supporting quotations.

Although Part (e) provided for reader response and allowed candidates to express their views, some were not clear about what they agreed or disagreed with. Quotations were cited but not enough to support a full and clear response to the question. Such responses did not allow candidates to earn full marks.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PAPER 01

1. Teachers/instructors should continue to provide opportunities for candidates to be exposed to literature.
2. Discussing literary devices must be continued. It is not good enough to merely identify or define devices.
3. Candidates in general need to base their inferences on a careful reading of the evidence in the passage as a whole. Students need to be taught the strategies that will assist them in arriving at meaning based on a thoughtful processing of the events described.

4. While in this paper no marks are formally awarded for the use of language, teachers are encouraged to offer students parallel Standard English constructions to the dialect responses that students offer to the questions. Too often, candidates' admissible responses to questions are inaccessible to those who do not share knowledge of their dialect. We therefore recommend that teachers give students the feedback on the Standard English translation of their correct responses to the questions.

Paper 02 – Essay Questions

The following are the skills and aptitudes tested in Paper 02 (as outlined on Page 23 of the syllabus):

- i) The ability to respond to West Indian and other literatures in English: novels, poems and plays; to make rational and sensitive appraisal of value judgments, states of consciousness and other concepts explained in literature, and to relate these to everyday living
- ii) Description, analysis (the ability to break down and select relevant details) and synthesis (the ability to bring together and condense, in a new form, information drawn from various sections of a text for the purpose of answering a particular question)
- iii) The ability to communicate informed opinions and judgments in well-structured, analytical responses in oral and written form using the vocabulary of literary criticism
- iv) The ability to produce balanced critical analyses
- v) The awareness of the writer's crafts (the writer as a person who employs various techniques in the shaping of language and the presentation of character and behaviour). This skill is tested throughout the examination and most particularly in Paper 02
- vi) The ability to recognize and distinguish between moral assumptions contained in a particular text
- vii) A grasp of concepts and values and an understanding of how these are manifested in literature.

Drama – The Merchant of Venice

Question 1

Questions about the casket scenes tend to yield good responses. For this the first January sitting of the English B examination, five times as many candidates attempted Question 1 as against Question 2. For Part (a), which required candidates to describe the test set for Portia's suitors and the consequences of their choosing wrongly, most candidates were able to describe the test, the types and inscriptions on the caskets. Many, however, were not as accurate in describing the consequences of the suitor's incorrect choice.

Part (b) required some analysis of the correct selection of the caskets, that is, how the test would ensure that Portia married someone who truly loved her. Candidates were expected to suggest how the test was designed to sift the suitors by exposing those who were concerned with outward appearance, glamour and glitter as well as those who were arrogant and vain. This sifting would identify the one who was willing to countenance dire consequences (of a single life). Only the one who would be willing to look beyond the outward appearance (base lead) to inner qualities would be considered worthy. Although candidates mentioned Portia's physical attributes, many failed to mention the qualities of the suitors who would take such a risk. For the most part, the tendency in this part of the question was for candidates to gloss over the issue of outward appearance.

Part (c) was the most challenging to candidates. Some claimed that not enough information was given in the text about Shylock as a father, therefore they could not discuss him. Other candidates adopted a one-sided approach and did not see anything positive about Shylock. Many candidates missed the comparative element that was required. However, insightful responses mentioned that at heart, both fathers wanted what was best for their daughters (seeing that they married well) even though their methods were different. The fathers' attitude to wealth is the most obvious point of departure. Portia's father provides lavishly for her, whereas Shylock hoards his money; Portia's father puts her above money whereas Shylock would prefer to have Jessica dead and his jewels restored to him.

The better prepared candidates produced well-developed essays and three (0.56%) of 539 candidates who attempted this question achieved the total score of 35. The mean for this question was 19.51.

Question 2

Although the mercy speech is well known, this question was not a popular choice. Few candidates outlined the details of the speech: Shylock would be blessed if he is merciful; mercy is a mark of greatness; justice alone cannot lead to salvation; that if we want to be shown mercy, we must be merciful. Many candidates had difficulty remembering what Portia said about mercy. However, there were some insightful responses about the mercy shown to Shylock. Many candidates were au fait with the 'theatrics' of the scene — the sharpened knife and Shylock's thirst for blood.

The irony of the 'merciful' Christians was not lost to the insightful candidates, but the details of Part (b) were lacking to a large extent. Gratiano's behaviour (his taunting of Shylock by telling him that soon he will not have enough money to buy cord to hang himself) and Shylock's reminder that these Christians were themselves slaveholders who treated their slaves like asses and dogs simply because they owned them, were some examples.

Part (c), which required that candidates comment on the mercy shown to Shylock, proved to be challenging to many candidates. This part of the question assessed the writer's technique and required analytical strength from the candidates. If Part (b) were handled well, as in identifying the irony and inconsistencies of the Christians, candidates should have moved logically to Part (c). Weaker candidates merely repeated information used to respond to Part (b). Ideally, the use of dramatic irony and an interrogation of 'mercy' (which is bitter-sweet) would have been sufficient for Part (c). This part of the question is essentially reader response and candidates must be confident in expressing their informed judgment.

While none of the 99 (12%) candidates who attempted this question scored full marks, one candidate scored 34. The mean for this question was 12.61.

Fences

Question 3

Almost an equal distribution of candidates attempted the questions set on *Fences*. The text is widely known, and for Question 3, so were the ways in which Troy wronged his family. Although candidates were quite competent in discussing the ways in which he wronged Rose and Cory, some candidates were not able to discuss the ways in which Troy wronged Gabriel. Expected responses for the ways in which Cory wronged Gabriel included how he used Gabriel's disability money to fix his home; how he forced Gabriel to live with Miss Pearl and how he signed the committal papers to get some of his money.

For Part (b), candidates were required to show how forgiveness and hope are presented dramatically in the final scene of the play. Most candidates demonstrated awareness of forgiveness and hope, but too many could not discuss how this was **dramatically** presented. Among the expected responses were: what Raynell represents (as

the new generation); Raynell's garden and the attendant symbolism; Raynell and Cory singing the blues; the presence of all whom Troy offended at the funeral; Gabriel's dance, among many others.

Approximately 99 (11%) candidates attempted this question. The highest score achieved in this question was 32. The mean for this question was 17.86.

Question 4

Part (a) required candidates to discuss how Rose nurtured Troy, Cory and Raynell. Candidates' responses revealed that they were knowledgeable about Rose, and the ways in which she nurtured Troy, Cory and Raynell. Part (b) of the question was not handled as well. Candidates were required to show how Rose was both hurt and blessed in her relationship with Troy. Candidates' treatment of the subject was one-sided. Many were able to show how Rose was hurt, but were not able to do a similar treatment on how she was blessed. Candidates could have presented her as being 'blessed' in the following ways: Troy gave her a roof over her head; he brought home his salary; seemed to have been faithful for a while; and was affectionate to her.

Candidates, who adopt a dualistic interpretation of characters and situations as good or bad, black or white, generally see less subtlety and complexity than their open-minded peers.

Poetry

Question 5

Slightly over one-third of the candidates attempted Question 5 as against Question 6. Part (a) required candidates to describe two poems in which Nature and technology are in conflict. While candidates were able to describe the details in some degree, there was not enough about the conflict between Nature and technology. A few candidates were more accurate in their description by pointing to the contrast. Merely mentioning the deer on the winding road in "Travelling through the Dark" or the presence of the Spaniards in the natives' territory in "From the Emigrants", did not point sufficiently to the conflict between Nature and technology. This portion of the question demanded knowledge of the texts and it would appear that this pre-selection was not advantageous to candidates as many seemed to be more conversant with "Travelling through the Dark" than "From the Emigrants."

Part (b), which required candidates to identify a poetic device in each poem used to comment on the impact of Nature and technology and comment on the effectiveness proved to be challenging to the candidates. Even when devices were correctly identified, candidates failed to link them to the question (in this case the impact of technology on Nature) or comment on their effectiveness.

Part (c) was for the most part, reader response. However, the 'message' each poet is presenting through the portrayal of Nature and technology should be grounded in textual evidence. The deer in "Travelling through the Dark" is supposed to be in its habitat and it is man's incursion that puts both deer and people in danger. The fate of the fawn is at the mercy or whim of man. Painful decisions are necessary for survival. Columbus' sojourn to the West Indies in "From the Emigrants" had disastrous consequences. His encounter with the natives was an unequal one. Pitted against the bullets, spears and sea power, the natives did not stand a chance. Technology might win.

This question was not well done. The highest mark earned was 28 and the mean mark was 9.33. Two hundred and forty-four candidates attempted this question.

Question 6

This question required candidates to identify two poems by name and discuss the theme of death. Part (a) asked candidates for a description of the situation that caused the speaker to think about death and Part (b), the reaction of each speaker to the encounter with death. For Part (b), many candidates confused the speaker and the poet. Part (b) was an opportunity for comparison of speakers, for instance, in terms of how the encounter with death is treated. All poems on the syllabus could have been used, although some clearly provided more 'mileage' than others. Part (c) was as usual the most challenging as most candidates were not able to discuss the effectiveness of the poetic device even when correctly identified. The tendency was to explain and not analyse. Further, in the discussion, there was the tendency to divorce the effectiveness of the device from the theme of death, indicated in the stem of the question.

Three of the 542 candidates who attempted Question 6 earned 33 of the 35 marks. While this question did better than Question 5 with a mean of 14.71, a better performance in the Poetry Profile is desired.

Prose Fiction

The comparative questions on West Indian and non-West Indian novels offer candidates the opportunity to explore themes, concepts and narrative techniques which can often allow them to see levels of meaning and understanding while they are discussing the question. The outstanding candidates demonstrate these flashes of insight as they approach the question from unique angles, interpreting power, or dreams and aspirations, or friendship in less obvious, but perceptive ways and using the comparison, whether stated or implied, to call attention to fresh ways of understanding. Competent scripts generally take the safe, literal, concrete interpretation of the question and the text and often merely demonstrate an accurate and appropriate reading of the storyline. Candidates will find greater enjoyment and fascination with the novels if they are encouraged to see the connotative and symbolic implications of the texts, a character like Beka or David or Billy or Alan as symbolic of a group or age or nation. That leap in understanding could make the most concrete, basic reader of a text offer exceptionally creative interpretations to these questions. There were several examples in this cohort where these gems were revealed.

On the other hand, inappropriate use of texts resulted in reduction of marks. Some candidates were not conversant with the current texts or with the details necessary to answer the questions. In some instances, they lost marks (many times 50% of the content) because they used drama texts such as *The Merchant of Venice* or *Fences* to answer questions which are clearly genre-specific. Some candidates used popular fiction such as *Harry Potter*. In other instances, texts not on the prescribed list for Prose Fiction, such as *A Cow Called Boy* or old CSEC texts such as *Green Days by the River* and *To Kill a Mockingbird* were used. It was not unusual to find instances where candidates used their creativity to write their own life stories to answer the questions. In the latter case, no marks were awarded for that effort.

Far too often the comparative nature was missing from the discussion. Many candidates merely narrated the texts, disregarding the question.

Question 7

Approximately 212 (26%) of the candidates attempted this question. Candidates were required to discuss how a major character in one West Indian and one non-West Indian novel is oppressed by the power of another person or institution and struggles against oppression in a bid for freedom. Most candidates demonstrated knowledge of the characters who wielded power, but those who were powerless proved somewhat troublesome. Additionally, the second part of the question which focused on the struggles in the bid for freedom was often left undone. Candidates must ensure that they respond to all the areas of the task in order to access the marks.

While no candidate earned full marks for this question, one candidate scored 34. The mean mark for this question was 17.42. This was the highest mean in the section.

Question 8

Question 8 was the most popular question for Prose Fiction. Approximately, 365 (45%) of the candidates attempted this question. Candidates were required to select a major character in a West Indian and non-West Indian text who dreams of a better life and discuss the struggles that character goes through in attempting to make those dreams come through. Whereas candidates were proficient in articulating the dream of the major characters, they were not so sure-footed about the struggles. Similar to Question 7, candidates must ensure that they can competently address all aspects of the question before selecting it.

While no candidate earned full marks for this question, one candidate scored 33. The mean mark for this question was 14.99, approximately, the same as Question 7.

Question 9

Approximately 135 (17%) of the candidates attempted this question. Candidates were required to discuss the extent to which the statement ‘A good friend is better than money’ applies to a major character in one West Indian and one non-West Indian novel. This question clearly demonstrated that candidates are quite knowledgeable of the content of the texts. They, however, displayed very little knowledge in critical analysis of the text and the question.

Admirably, two candidates were able to earn the highest score of 35. The mean for this question was 15.16.

Question 10

This was the least popular question in this section. It was attempted by approximately 95 (11%) of the candidates. The focus of this question was explicitly the writers’ craft and many shied away from it. Some candidates who attempted it were able to make connections to the titles and texts; many simply narrated the stories or reconstructed the lives of the major characters. The writers’ craft was not addressed and in many instances misunderstood.

One candidate earned the highest mark of 35. The mean for this question was 10.25. It was the lowest mean for the section.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PAPER 02

1. Candidates need to be conscious of the demands of the comparative essay, as in Paper 02, Questions 5 and 6 (Poetry) and Questions 7–10 (Prose Fiction).
2. Candidates need to know that 2011 is the final year of the cycle for the May/June examinations and January 2012, for the January examinations. Knowledge of the revised syllabus is necessary. Candidates need to select the appropriate texts from the revised syllabus to study for the May/June 2012 Examination for English B.