

CARIBBEAN EXAMINATIONS COUNCIL

**REPORT ON CANDIDATES' WORK IN THE
CARIBBEAN ADVANCED PROFICIENCY EXAMINATION**

MAY/JUNE 2003

LITERATURES IN ENGLISH

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GENERAL COMMENTS

The 2003 examination for Literatures in English Unit I and Unit II saw a combined candidate entry of 1528, compared with 1073 in examination year 2002. In Unit I, eighty-one percent of the candidates achieved Grades I – V in the 2003 examination. Candidates showed competence in answering questions on the Prose module but were not as proficient on the Drama and Poetry modules. In Unit II, ninety-three per cent of the candidates achieved Grades I – V in this year's examination. Candidates in Unit II performed best on the Drama module while their weakest performance was on the Poetry module. This year, just as in 2002, the candidates did not seem to have been properly prepared for the examination. It was clear that in too many instances the syllabus was not being interpreted carefully enough. While several examples from the Internal Assessment gave the most graphic evidence of this problem, the responses to the other two papers also indicated that the genre-based nature of the syllabus is not being emphasized.

Since the Paper 02 contributes the highest portion of the overall marks, candidates will have to improve on their essay writing, question analysis and argumentative skills in order to improve their performance. In addition, they need to demonstrate knowledge of the genre. Candidates have tended to perform poorly especially on the Poetry Module of Paper 01 and this also helps to weaken the overall performance on Paper 01. Finally, more consistent and creative work needs to be done in the teaching of poetry.

DETAILED COMMENTS

UNIT 1

PAPER 01

Module 1 – Drama

Candidates found this extract interesting and responded satisfactorily to the questions.

Question 1

Candidates seemed to have found the question fairly straightforward and responded satisfactorily.

Question 2

Knowledge of the dramatic concept of suspense was clear from the candidates' correct responses to this question.

Question 3

For the most part, candidates understood characterization in drama and responded satisfactorily to the question.

Question 4

Candidates' responses showed that they understood both irony and stage direction and they could explain how these techniques helped to convey the playwright's meaning. This question was also satisfactorily done.

Question 5

While candidates could identify examples of humour, they were less than satisfactory in their explanations of how humour is produced. They also experienced difficulty in commenting on the significance or overall significance of literary strategies. The higher-level skills of synthesis, evaluation and commentary are lacking. At this level, candidates need to receive much more practice in explaining the effectiveness of literary techniques.

Module 2 - Poetry

While many candidates seemed to understand the poem, the responses were generally less than satisfactory. Many of them failed to explain the effectiveness of poetic devices and failed to comment on their **overall** significance. Of the three genres, the performance on poetry seems to be the least satisfactory. Much more attention needs to be given to poetry.

Question 6

Generally, many candidates were able to identify the form of the poem as that of a sonnet or dramatic monologue.

Question 7

This question requiring inference and analysis on one of the most basic of poetic techniques – comparison between two essentially unlike concepts or objects – was not as satisfactorily answered as examiners would have expected.

Question 8

Candidates could identify the literary devices in the examples but failed to effectively comment on the significance of their use in the poem. Again, the higher-level skills of evaluating the choice of literary technique for effective communication are not evident. Poetry has to be taught, not merely as a comprehension exercise, but as a literary genre.

Question 9

While most candidates could recognize the significance of the word “but” in line 9 of the poem, they were not all able to give **two** reasons for its use. Many also failed to understand the meaning of the word “this” in line 14, perhaps because they do not pay enough attention to syntax.

Question 10

This question, asking candidates to talk about overall significance, was also poorly done. This highlights the need for the skills of synthesis and evaluation to be emphasized much more.

Module 3 - Prose Fiction

This module was satisfactorily done except in the question that required evaluative commentary. The candidates seemed to have found the passage interesting.

Question 11

Candidates were able to use context clues and their knowledge of Caribbean expressions to explain the meaning of the phrase “gave someone the length of her tongue”. They were also able to make inferences about character portrayal, although a few candidates extrapolated too far beyond the evidence of the passage or the lines designated.

Question 12

Satisfactory answers were given to this question. Candidates were able to express in their own words the inferences they had drawn about the children’s responses to their mother.

Question 13

Again, the section of the question requiring commentary on effectiveness of a literary device – symbolism – was in most cases, not satisfactorily done. However, some candidates gave some exceptional responses that suggested they were evaluating literary devices carefully and insightfully.

Question 14

Candidates’ responses to the question on ways that the writer helps the reader to empathise with the mother, were satisfactory.

Question 15

Many candidates could not decipher the meaning of “ostentatiously”, hence the significance of its use was lost on them. More work on vocabulary needs to be done. The second part of the question was satisfactorily answered. This required candidates to briefly explain two ways in which the writer conveys the strength of the emotional bond between the children and the grandmother.

PAPER 02

In this section of the examination, candidates showed general weakness in their ability to analyze questions carefully and construct a cogent argument as a response. Essay writing and question analysis skills need to be constantly emphasized. This is also true for the basic literary vocabulary and concepts. For candidates to score high on this genre-based syllabus, they need to demonstrate an understanding of the distinctiveness of each genre and also to show knowledge of the ways in which each genre manipulates literary devices for effect. Discussion of the content alone will not guarantee satisfactory performance.

Module 1 – Drama

Question 1

While most candidates understood the terms “inferior” and “serious,” they had difficulty understanding the literary vocabulary - “comic,” “farcical” and “heroic.”

Not surprisingly then, they had difficulty demonstrating knowledge of the genre in their responses to the questions. Understanding how playwrights manipulate the resources of the genre for effective communication is crucial at this level.

Question 2

Candidates understood the terms in this question better than those in Question 1. However, many failed to make use of the varied interpretations of the term “fantastic” and, in some cases, they totally misunderstood the term. Although the question gave them the option to discuss either the “fantastic” or the “realistic” qualities, they found it difficult to separate them. Again, they often failed to show sufficient knowledge of the genre.

Overall, the performance on this module was barely satisfactory.

Module 2 – Poetry

Question 3

Fewer candidates responded to this question than those who attempted Question 4. This question was poorly done. While Wordsworth was an easy choice for this question, most candidates interpreted “beauty” only as applicable to subject matter but not to the idea of the aesthetic dimensions of poetry. Also, not enough argument was generated around the provocative statement – “Poetry’s primary concern is not with beauty, not with philosophical truth, not with persuasion, but with experience.”

Question 4

This question was, by far, the more popular choice. However, the basic terminology “formal arrangement” was not fully understood. Candidates did poorly on this question although it provided a great opportunity to demonstrate knowledge of the genre. It was surprising to note that the same poems were being used in the candidates’ responses as if only a few poems of the selection were being taught. The more knowledge the candidates’ have the greater will be their flexibility in responding to questions.

Module 3 – Prose Fiction

Question 5

Candidates did not seem to understand the concept of the “journey motif”. They tended to treat journey only in the most literal sense. The idea of journey as a structuring device in narrative was not explored satisfactorily. The term “motif” is a common word associated with the prose fiction genre. More emphasis needs to be given to the vocabulary and concepts associated with the various genres.

Question 6

This question was the more popular of the two on this section of the paper. However, candidates did not focus enough attention to the words in the question and many only discussed “human relationships” rather than the “complexities of human relationships.” The responses to this question were barely satisfactory.

PAPER 03 - Internal Assessment

In preparing candidates for these assignments, teachers need to pay close attention to the syllabus. It is clear that candidates are not being given the proper guidance. For example, while the syllabus allows for presentations in the form of “audio or video tape, a model, a cartoon strip, a painting,” these must all fulfil the objectives set. They must also be accompanied by an “explanatory text” (see section (iii) on page 20 of syllabus). In some instances the question given as the assignment by the teachers does not help the candidates to fulfil the objectives of the syllabus. This problem is evident especially in the reviews on the drama and poetry modules. Also, reviews of plays or critical essays should not be more than the stipulated 750 words. While candidates are allowed to consult sources, they should not do so at the expense of their personal response. Too heavy a dependence on outside sources is evident. Often, some of these sources (especially from the Internet) are not properly acknowledged and this non-acknowledgment constitutes plagiarism. The use of sources should act not as a substitute but as a stimulus for the candidates’ personal response. Generally, though, there has been improvement in the candidates’ performance on the Internal Assessment.

Module 1 – Drama

There were many creative responses to this section and it was clear that candidates had the opportunity to use their talents in response to this assignment. However, many of them did not provide the required explanatory text nor did they seem to be fulfilling the objectives of the syllabus in this section. Many candidates provided reviews of film versions of plays. However, too many candidates provided plot summaries or textual analysis without any attention to evaluating the features of the production that might make the film adaptation an effective one. While fewer candidates chose to review live performances, these were more focused reviews. Again, candidates are reminded that an evaluation of the effectiveness of the production is absolutely crucial for gaining high marks.

Module 2 – Poetry

Candidates’ responses on this module suggested that few of them are using the assignment to demonstrate their skill of evaluation. Too often, candidates only summarize the critical essay without any evaluation of the critic’s argument. There is the tendency to agree with the critic’s point of view without any justification and often no questioning of the critic’s opinion or views. It is also apparent that some of the essays are not suitable for this assignment. Many of the essays are often too long and complex, while others are too truncated and simplistic to offer enough substance for evaluation.

Length, difficulty and scope for critical engagement must be used as guidelines for selecting passages. Teachers should be reminded that the syllabus stipulates that the review should be done in one hour during class and that it should be between 500-750 words. Based on length of submissions for moderation, there is evidence that this stipulation is not being followed.

Candidates whose submissions extend beyond the word limit will be compromising their ability to score well on these reviews.

Module 3 – Prose Fiction

The performance on this module was the most satisfactory of the three modules. Again, teachers should ensure that this is a class activity and that candidates stay within the word limit. Questions given to candidates should test objectives 2 and 6 of the module.

UNIT 2

PAPER 01

Module 1 – Drama

Candidates seem to have enjoyed the extract and responded satisfactorily to the questions.

Question 1

Most candidates understood the function of stage directions in dramatic characterization and provided adequate responses to the question.

Question 2

It was gratifying to see from the candidates' response to this question that they fully understood the role of the props manager, and how stage symbols might be used effectively. This question was generally well handled.

Question 3

Candidates did not respond adequately to this question. Explaining the dramatic effect of certain actions on stage seemed to pose problems for some candidates.

Question 4

Most candidates could explain the significance of sound effect and responded satisfactorily to this question.

Question 5

This question did not seem to pose problems for the majority of the candidates. They were able to identify the dramatic speech as a soliloquy and to recognize the dramatic significance of Amope's last speech.

Module 2 – Poetry

Question 6

Generally, candidates could identify the main context/situation of the poem.

Question 7

Most candidates also responded satisfactorily to the question on characterization.

Question 8

The first part of the question asking for identification of rhyme was by far the easiest question for candidates. However, explaining the significance of the particular rhyme created challenges for many candidates.

Question 9

Candidates seemed to encounter difficulty in identifying techniques, other than figures of speech. This question on tone was unsatisfactorily done. The second part of the question requiring explanation of the significance of the poetic technique was also poorly handled.

Question 10

Candidates seemed to know the sonnet form and answered this question satisfactorily.

Module 3 - Prose Fiction

Question 11

Candidates responded satisfactorily to this question, identifying the woman's tone of voice and recognizing the narrative techniques used to achieve this tone.

Question 12

This question, which looked at the author's use of opposite terms in the description of the house and the barn, was also well done.

Question 13

Candidates responded very well to this question that looked at the boy's reaction to the conversation about the new barn.

Question 14

Many candidates seemed to understand the conflicts among the characters and responded very well to the questions on characterization.

Question 15

This question posed the greatest difficulty for the candidates, especially Part (b) that required candidates to comment on the function of the dramatic incidents in the final scene.

PAPER 02**Module 1 – Drama**

Again the general comments for Unit 1 Paper 02 are relevant to Unit 2 as well. On this section of the examination, candidates demonstrated general weakness in their ability to analyze questions carefully and construct a cogent argument as a response. Essay writing and question analysis skills need to be emphasized. Too many candidates failed to take into consideration all the terms of the question. It is also clear that the basic literary vocabulary and concepts also need to be emphasized. For candidates to score high on this genre-based syllabus, they need to show knowledge of the three genres because they tend to treat all genres as narrative. Candidates need to learn the skills and concepts of the syllabus instead of simply being prepared for an examination.

Question 1

While candidates understood the terms “human” and “predicament,” they failed to engage with “the human predicament” as the question requested. Also, many failed to see how paying attention to the phrase “more fully”, allowed for latitude in developing various arguments. Not enough real engagement with the terms of the question was generally seen. The candidates seemed to encounter serious difficulties in applying general ideas to specific texts. The responses were barely satisfactory.

Question 2

Again, candidates focused only on some of the terms. The term “powerfully presented” that allowed greater latitude for argument was generally ignored. The candidates also tended to ignore the idea of dramatic presentation and, thus, lost the opportunity to show knowledge of the genre.

Module 2 – PoetryQuestion 3

It was surprising that the term “economy of language” provided so much difficulty for the candidates. To talk about poetry as a distinct genre from prose or drama necessitates an understanding of the ways in which poets use language economically. This question demonstrated that the genre-based approach of the syllabus is not being stressed. The responses to this question were barely satisfactory.

Question 4

While candidates understood that the question was asking them to discuss the sound quality of poetry, they failed to use the terms associated with specific devices accurately. They also encountered difficulty choosing relevant examples to support their responses. Again, they repeated the same three poems in many responses. This suggests they were not adequately prepared for the examination. The fact that the rubric of this question requires candidates to use three poems does not mean they should prepare only three poems. This question was poorly done.

Module 3 - Prose Fiction

Question 5

While candidates responded satisfactorily to this question, there was insufficient discussion of the generic qualities of prose fiction. While most could discuss thematic and character development, aspects such as narrative point of view, motifs, symbolism and other literary devices were not often discussed. Many candidates also ignored the phrase “compare the representation” and therefore tended to give examples of personal relationships, without any attention to the writer’s techniques in representing these relationships. They also failed to offer a comparative analysis of the two books chosen.

Question 6

Many candidates attempted this question and performed satisfactorily. There were some exceptional answers to this question, although too many candidates were content to list dramatic moments, rather than discuss, the significance of these moments to the narrative as a whole.

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