

**CARIBBEAN EXAMINATIONS COUNCIL**

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

**JANUARY 2012**

**ENGLISH B  
GENERAL PROFICIENCY**

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## GENERAL COMMENTS

The English B examination 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 each 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 those 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.

## DETAILED COMMENTS

### Paper 01 – Short Answer

Paper 01 assesses the following skills:

- Comprehension
- 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 on Paper 01 was below that of 2011. Overall, the mean performance in Profile 1, Drama, was 8.95; in Profile 2, Poetry, 8.97; and Profile 3, Prose Fiction, 7.34. The weakest performance was in Prose Fiction.

### Question 1

The more able candidates (47.6%) were able to access marks which ranged from 10 to 15 (15 marks being the maximum). The extract seemed to have resonated with candidates and many were able to appreciate the humour.

Most of the candidates were able to earn the full marks allocated to Part (a). This question asked candidates to identify the “important day” in the extract. Part (b), comprising two parts, probed Celsus’s view of himself as being “ca-coa”. Whereas candidates could identify two other images such as *being a dead man* or *being tied up*, many of them could not explain what these images suggest about Celsus’s condition. Acceptable responses included *the feeling of hopelessness; the feeling of having no future; the feeling of unhappiness (going to a funeral) and the feeling of having his freedom taken away*. Some candidates merely repeated the idea that Celsus feels he was bewitched.

Part (c) asked for textual support for the two different attitudes to marriage presented in the extract. Candidates rightly understood that the comparison lay between Celsus and Mr Jack but many could not name the attitude, for example, *pride*, on Mr Jack’s part (his early marriage and defense of his wife’s good name) and Celsus’s *fear* and even *resentment* since he thinks that his wedding day is more in keeping with going to a funeral.

Candidates were spot on in identifying one comic incident in Part d (i) but they were not as sure-footed on the dramatic functions of Helen’s exit and entrance in Part (d) (ii). Many candidates could not move beyond the literal. Very few saw that Helen’s exit (to get the drink) was a means of clearing the stage to allow Celsus and Mr Jack to become the focus of attention (taking centre stage). When she enters with the drink, the men are fighting so Helen’s presence could be that she is the one to break up the fight and ease the tension onstage.

Part (e) was a reader-response item (suggesting a title and justifying the selection). The onus was on 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 moved outside of the text. Candidates need to remember that reader-response items are always text-based.

### Question 2

Candidates performed best on Question 2, Poetry, with more candidates earning full marks, as against Drama and Prose Fiction. For Part (a), candidates were able to identify two activities in the first stanza, as they were attuned to the crab-catching event and the reactions of the speaker and his sister Ruby.

Part (b) asked candidates to state one difference between stanza 1 and 2 using evidence from the text. Some candidates confused stanzas with line numbering. Acceptable responses *indicated the differences in time (past and present, as in Ma was alive in the first stanza but dead in the second stanza); the geographical location is also different (the savannah versus America and England); and the difference in mood (light-hearted innocence and fun as against the dislocation, decay and fear)*.

Part (c) assessed poetic technique and required candidates to identify one literary device and comment on its effectiveness. Although candidates were provided the prompts (the lines as well as phrases for discussion were listed) many of them ignored the instruction and discussed all three devices, instead of choosing one. Many candidates were unable to name the device in “squelching through mud” and even though some of the responses captured the sound of bare feet treading through the mud, many did not mention onomatopoeia. Many candidates identified the personification in “Death long catch Ma” but were short on commenting on the personification of death. Responses discussing the inevitability of death and

the passage of time were acceptable. Another personification was seen in “the house boarded up/breeding wasps”. Although many candidates pointed to the decay and disuse, better responses discussed *the absence of warmth/human presence and the fact that destructive insects have now inhabited the house*.

Candidates had a fair sense of the feelings of the speaker (*he is afraid to return home; his feelings of guilt; and his reluctance to face the past*) and Part (d) asked candidates to suggest two such feelings.

Part (e) (i), which asked candidates to comment on the poet’s use of the crab image, was the most challenging task. Responses were vague. It would appear that the word *image* was not easily understood. Acceptable responses could have included any of the following: *the crab as a source of food; representing communal living; the mother is compared to a crab; and the idea of doubleness (mating/family) and singleness (absence of family)*.

Part (e) (ii) was a reader-response item which only proved challenging for those who did not have ‘strong’ justification for providing another title for the poem.

### Question 3

Candidates’ responses to both sections of Part (a) demonstrated that they understood why Aunt Lissy slapped the boy and that they could identify an expression that showed the intensity of the slap. Most candidates could select a suitable image to present the relationship between Aunt Lissy and the pickaninnies such as *herd of pickaninnies* or *a stork among the chicks scurrying behind Aunt Lissy* in Part (b) but could neither determine the relationship nor comment on its effectiveness. Acceptable responses that commented on the effectiveness of the image of “herd of pickaninnies” captured the idea of Aunt Lissy as leader who will whip the other animals into submission, and “herd” reinforcing the animal imagery. The image of “a stork” is effective as the maturing boy is seen as a maturing stork to be separated from the other chicks which are dependent on Aunt Lissy. Also captured here is the bird image through the movement of the children (scurrying) and the contrast in height and demeanour of the boy and the other children. Other candidates described the relationship but failed to identify the image. Some candidates looked at the relationship between Aunt Lissy and the boy and ignored the other children.

Part (c) required candidates to give two impressions of the boy which are created and textual support for these impressions. Some candidates lost marks because they did not treat the question in its entirety. Some candidates mentioned the *impressions* but did not provide textual support while others cited lines/phrases from the passage but did not provide the impressions. The following are acceptable responses: *the boy is defiant or determined because he thought of the word [Damballah] in his mind/ he refused to cry; the boy is independent because he thought of a time when he will be rid of Aunt Lissy when he is no longer under her control or his thinking of a time when he will be doing manly things*.

While most candidates were able to identify what was “heathen talk” in Part (d) and were able to comment on Aunt Lissy’s value system to some extent, they missed the point that she rejected her own roots, and was embracing instead only what was American in a bid to wipe out all references to her past.

For Part (e), candidates were required to identify the literary device in a given phrase and comment on the effectiveness of it. Some candidates identified the device (in this case, metaphor) but were unable to assess its effectiveness. Others commented on the effectiveness but did not name the device. The metaphor in this instance *compares the confusion caused by Aunt Lissy’s instructions, warnings and admonitions to the cacophonous cackle of chickens. This reinforces the imagery of the hen with the brood of chickens. The animal imagery reinforces the fact that he does not see Aunt Lissy’s protectiveness as welcoming (seeing her cackle as noise in his head)*.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PAPER 01**

- Teachers/instructors should continue to provide opportunities for students to be exposed to literature.
- Discussing the effectiveness of literary devices must be the focus of continued analysis of style. It is not good enough to merely identify or define devices. Some devices such as onomatopoeia proved problematic to many candidates.
- 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.
- Candidates are encouraged to watch live and recorded plays so that they are better able to appreciate the *performance* element of the genre.
- Teachers could assist students to dramatize sections of plays in class, for example, dramatize scenes and to summarize scenes to encourage recall.

### **Paper 02 – Essay Questions**

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

- 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
- 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)
- The ability to communicate informed opinions and judgments in well-structured, analytical responses in oral and written form using the vocabulary of literary criticism
- The ability to produce balanced critical analyses
- The awareness of the writer's craft (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
- The ability to recognize and distinguish between moral assumptions contained in a particular text
- A grasp of concepts and values and an understanding of how these are manifested in literature.

## Drama – The Merchant of Venice

### Question 1

Part (a) required candidates to describe what happens in Act V, Scene I in which Portia and Nerissa quarrel with their husbands about the missing rings. Most candidates focused on the ring episode only, with no mention of others who were not directly involved in the couples' quarrel. Other details in this scene include the romantic moonlight setting with Lorenzo and Jessica, who were left in charge of Portia's house and Lancelot's announcement of Portia's pending arrival. Some candidates concentrated only on what happened after the wives' confrontation. Generally, it would appear that since this is a 'minor' scene, candidates were not sufficiently familiar with it.

For Part (b), candidates did a fairly good job of identifying a theme emanating from this scene). However, some of them could not sustain the discussion to treat this theme in light of this scene. However insightful candidates discussed themes such as love, friendship/loyalty, money, appearance versus reality, power, the role of women, fidelity, and commitment.

Part (c) asked for a discussion of two techniques Shakespeare used to entertain the audience. Appropriate responses would include *dramatic irony (as in disguise in the courtroom scene and the ring episodes)*; *pun (Gratiano's threat to mar the young clerk's 'pen')*; *suspense (casket and courtroom scenes)*. Candidates need to be more sensitive to dramatic techniques as distinctive features of this genre.

The total score of 35 was not achieved by any candidate. However, one candidate scored 33. The mean for this question was 10.42.

### Question 2

Candidates were asked to describe the events in Act III Scene IV, when Portia tells Nerissa, "We'll see our husbands before they think of us," for Part (a). Apart from mentioning that Portia tells Nerissa that they would be disguised as men and travel to Venice to meet their husbands, candidates were very short on details in this section of the question. Very few of them mentioned *the role Lorenzo plays in this scene, impressing on Portia how fine a gentleman Antonio was; that he was left in charge of Belmont while Portia takes her journey and the plans Portia sets in motion by sending her servant to her cousin Bellario, seeking his notes and garments*.

Part (b) required discussion of how disguise is used in one scene or instance in the play. Most candidates relished in the courtroom scene for the discussion of disguise. A few candidates mentioned how *Jessica disguised herself as a boy and escaped her father's house to marry Lorenzo*.

Commenting on the dramatic significance of disguise, (Part c), proved to be challenging to some candidates, who merely repeated information from Part (b). This section was open to the play as a whole, giving candidates full scope for discussion. Responses could have included: *dramatic irony in that the wives (and the audience of course) know their husbands during the courtroom scene but they did not; Portia uses her disguise to save her husband's friend's life; disguise (men's clothing) as a symbol of power; the advancement of the plot and development of themes; humour and entertainment*.

The following recommendations will enable candidates to better appreciate Shakespearean texts (and drama as a whole):

- Find creative ways to get students to summarize scenes (even the minor scenes).
- Dramatize scenes to aid recall.
- Identify dramatic techniques in live dramatizations and discussion of scenes/excerpts.
- Use technology (such as DVDs) to demonstrate how dramatic techniques work.
- Prepare worksheets with questions/tasks that focus on dramatic techniques.

Like Question 1, no candidate achieved the total score but one scored 33. The mean for this question was 13.80.

## Fences

### Question 3

Almost twice as many candidates attempted the questions set on *The Merchant of Venice* as against *Fences*. For Question 3, Parts (a) and (b) required knowledge of what led to the specific events of Act II Scene IV, when Cory retorts, “You ain’t never give me nothing!” Candidates did not handle this question well. Events leading up to his outburst include *Troy’s refusal to sign the permission papers for Cory which would have enabled him to be recruited to play college football; Troy’s poor parenting skills and lack of fatherly affection, even though he provides for his son materially; Cory’s deepening disrespect for Troy when he had Gabriel committed; when he had the affair with Alberta and was physically abusive to Ruth.*

Knowledge of the scene was important in answering Part (b) in terms of what the audience learns, such as the following: *Rose is continuing to care for Raynell even though she is estranged from Troy; Troy is promoted at work and is driving but appears to be lonely as he is not so close to Bono anymore; Cory is hurt by his father’s unfaithfulness and exploitation of Gabriel.*

The greatest challenge was noted in Part (c) which dealt with dramatic significance. Candidates seemed to simply resort to telling what happened in the cited scene instead of focusing on how this scene impacts the play as a whole. The dramatic significance of this scene can be noted in these ways: *Troy is at his worst here, in terms of all his relationships and this scene anticipates the hopefulness at the end of the play and the ways in which he will be redeemed; the culmination of the tension between father and son; the high energy in this scene is a fitting contrast to other quieter, humorous or even romantic scenes; ironically Troy is advancing at his workplace but things could not be worse at home; Cory being evicted is contrasted to earlier scenes when he is happily off to playing football or in the later scene, when he returns, smart and self-assured in his military uniform.*

The mean for this question was 11.74. The highest mark obtained for this question was 30.

### Question 4

Parts (a) and (b) were not as problematic as the final part of Question 4. Part (a) required candidates to show what Rose wants Cory to understand by her statement, “Your daddy wanted you to be everything he wasn’t...” Candidates were expected to mention some of the many instances when Troy’s behaviour and action suggested that he wanted his son to be more successful than he. *Troy wanted better for Cory and that was why he bullied him so much; he did not want Cory to be affected as he did by racism so he discouraged him from football and encouraged him to further his education; he wanted Cory to be strong, independent and honest.*

In seeking to respond to how Rose influences the audience's feelings about Troy in the end, Part (b) dealt with Rose's ability to affect the reaction of the audience in responding to Troy. *Her reception of the family and Bono into the home gives the image of a reunited family. Rose's response to Cory's initial refusal to attend Troy's funeral (her view that it was unthinkable that a boy could disrespect his daddy in this way) shows the audience that with all his faults, Troy is to be honoured and respected. Even though Troy had hurt people, Rose is in support of his memory and the audience believes her when she notes that even though Troy wasn't always right, his intentions were good.*

Like Question 3, the highest score for this question, obtained by one candidate, was 30. The mean for this question was 9.08.

## Poetry

### Question 5

Slightly under 50 per cent of the candidates attempted Question 5 as against Question 6. Part (a) required candidates to describe the situation which caused the speaker's dream not to be fulfilled in "The Carpenter's Complaint" and "Dreaming Black Boy". For the most part, candidates were able to describe the situation in both poems although some responses were vague in that the former poem, the speaker's anger at being deprived of the chance of making his friend's casket and the latter, the racist society in which the speaker lived, were glossed over.

Part (b) was reader response in that candidates were to use textual references to discuss which speaker in the two poems was more appealing. Candidates tended to find the boy in "Dreaming Black Boy" more appealing (arguing that the adult carpenter in the other poem faced a different and less damaging kind of discrimination) but could not, in some instances, justify their position.

Part (c) proved to be challenging and here candidates were asked to identify and comment on one poetic device used to explore the idea of unfulfilled dreams. For "The Carpenter's Complaint", the most common submission was the simile *stand up straight as a plumb-line* but there are others that could be mentioned and discussed. The use of repetition (repeated use of the "I"; "big-belly", "big-shot", "it hot me", "it burn me") reinforces and enhances the simmering anger and resentment which boils over into rage. Contrast also is used to allow the reader to appreciate the passion of the carpenter, as insights are gained about his dead friend and the extent of the snub (depriving him of participating in the final ritual). Therefore, the living and the dead; the burning anger of the speaker against the recollected memory of his friend's cool demeanour ("walk/Home cool, cool, cool") and the one-voiced ranting of the carpenter versus the 'silence' of his audience in the rum bar are other examples of contrast. Irony is also used in this poem when the carpenter mentions "Mr Belnavis." Clearly, the speaker is ridiculing this more socially acceptable gentleman.

Repetition (especially of "I wish") is also used in "Dreaming Black Boy" and candidates made references to this. This refrain highlighted the speaker's alienation and isolation, dreams and fears. And this wishing deepens the pathos. Contrast could be mentioned in that the poem presents a series of contrasts between the boy's dreams and the reality of his situation. This serves to heighten the intense pain and anxiety of a boy whose dreams will never be realized in this racist society. Allusions are also used in this poem and apart from Paul Robeson, all other allusions are negative — the "powers", "hotel keepers", "torch throwers" and "plotters." These negative allusions provide a contrast to the boy's dreams and reinforce the level of bigotry in the society.

The mean for this question was 8.80. The highest score achieved for this question, by one candidate, was 34.



### Question 6

This question required candidates to identify two poems by name and discuss the theme of conflict. Part (a) asked candidates for an explanation of the conflict and Part (b), the reaction of each speaker to the conflict. All poems on the syllabus could have been used, but it was evident that some candidates were unprepared in their selection. 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 some instances only one device was identified. If this is to be acceptable, the candidates must show its effectiveness (textually) in **both** poems. Sometimes there was the tendency to divorce the effectiveness of the device from the portrayal of conflict.

This question was the only question where the total score was achieved. The mean for this question was 12.11.

### **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.

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 per cent of the content) because they used drama texts such as *The Merchant of Venice* or *Fences* to answer questions which were clearly genre specific. 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

Candidates were required to discuss the extent to which the statement the desire for freedom is universal is applicable to a major character in one West Indian and one non-West Indian novel. Generally, candidates demonstrated a clear understanding of the question. However, candidates tended to write generally on the idea of freedom, making historical references without textual support, in some instances. The highest score obtained was 28. The mean for this question was 11.63.

### Question 8

This was the most popular question for Prose Fiction. Approximately, 50 per cent of the candidates attempted this question. Candidates were required to select a major character in a West Indian and non-West Indian text who experiences challenges. For each novel, candidates had to discuss the challenges faced by the character. Candidates displayed their ability to identify and elaborate on a range of challenges from the characters' experiences and showed their engagement with the texts they selected. Some of them even selected texts which were on previous and upcoming cycles.

The highest score obtained was 34. The mean for this question was 14.35.

### Question 9

This was the least popular prose question as less than 80 candidates attempted it. Candidates were asked to discuss how the writers help readers to sympathize with a child or young adult in one West Indian and one non-West Indian novel. They, however, displayed very little knowledge in critical analysis of the texts and the question. Many responses yielded inappropriate texts (the use of poems and plays) and this affected candidates' overall marks.

The mean for this question was 13.37. The highest score obtained was 34.

### Question 10

This question focused on prompting candidates to appreciate the writers' craft and many shied away from it. Some candidates who attempted it did not go much beyond discussions on the women generally and a few ventured to discuss the role of women in the texts.

The mean for this question is 6.14. The highest score obtained was 26.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PAPER 02**

- 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).
- A genre-specific approach is suggested so that candidates can better appreciate the discrete nature of the genres and not use them inappropriately in their responses.
- Teachers must continue to teach drama from a technical perspective and not as prose. The teaching and reinforcing of dramatic techniques must remain important.
- Modelling responses and more sustained practice are needed for candidates to sharpen their essay-writing skills.
- The use of technology is suggested to enhance and reinforce learning and appreciation of texts, for example, using websites to enrich the learning experience.
- Attention must be paid to **all** parts of questions.
- Special attention should be paid to the section of the questions addressing the devices and effectiveness as candidates continue to underperform in this area.
- An unusually large proportion of candidates did not attempt all three questions required in Paper 02, largely because they were caught in the difference between the cycles of the syllabus. They were prepared for the June 2012 paper, but were entered for the January 2012 examination, the last of its cycle. This accounts for the significant decline in performance in this cycle's results. Teachers are strongly advised to note the difference in focus especially in the Prose section, the changes in the Drama texts and the alterations in the selected poems. The change in set texts will seriously handicap candidates who are not prepared.

- **Candidates need to know that June 2012 is the beginning of the new cycle. Knowledge of the revised syllabus is necessary. For the Prose section in Paper 02, the only comparative questions will be those set on the Short Stories. All other prose questions will be on single texts. Candidates need to select the appropriate texts from the revised syllabus to study for the May/June 2012 examination for English B.**