

CARIBBEAN EXAMINATIONS COUNCIL

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

JUNE 2004

ENGLISH B

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**ENGLISH B
GENERAL PROFICIENCY EXAMINATION
JUNE 2004**

GENERAL COMMENTS

In 2004, the second year of a new cycle (2003 - 2005), the overall examination performance was quite consistent with that of 2003. Mark allocations were again indicated for the various parts of each question. This helped candidates to manage their time more efficiently.

Generally, candidates demonstrated an acceptable familiarity with texts and understanding of them, and displayed a satisfactory grasp of the mechanics of writing. Still, avoidable errors in grammar, spelling and punctuation are far too common across the board. Teachers and candidates need to be reminded that there is no such word as “alot” in standard English; and that “all right” is the standard form of the phrase; and that “its” is the possessive form of the pronoun (Every dog must have its day); and that “it’s” is an abbreviated form of “it is.”

Some candidates demonstrated a commendable ability to organize ideas into logical, well-argued paragraphs; to frame their essays effectively with an introduction and conclusion; and to effect a smooth transition from quotation to discussion. Too many, however, made little effort to structure their responses. It must be emphasized that while the candidate is not penalized for sectionalizing responses, more marks are given for a well-developed essay.

While most candidates performed very well in segments of questions requiring recall, most were not as competent in analysing texts. Questions that asked for a discussion of the dramatic significance, or for comments on poetic devices, for instance, tended to be poorly done.

Candidates need to be taught how to read examination questions carefully, and to respond fully or briefly, as instructed, to all parts. Their attention should be drawn to the meaning of instructional words used in the examination such as “Comment on,” “Describe,” “Identify,” “Compare,” and “Discuss.” These all require different responses, and “briefly” means just what it says. They should know, too, that proper names should ideally be correctly spelt, and the titles of works underlined.

Far too many candidates still disregard the caution that the same text is not to be used to respond to more than one question, and many continue to use texts that are not on the syllabus. Candidates should be reminded that they will be penalized for not observing these instructions.

Intention of Questions

All questions were designed to test the specific skills listed on Page 8 of the syllabus:

1. Knowledge and Insight (Profile 1)
 - (a) Relevance and adequacy of content
 - (b) Relevance and accuracy of illustration
 - (c) Quality/Clarity of argument

2. Organizing of Response (Profile 2)
 - (a) Organizing (Structure and development of relevant ideas or points into coherent paragraphs)
 - (b) Grammar and mechanics of writing (Sentence structure, punctuation, spelling, diction, etc.)

Skills and Aptitudes Tested in Paper 01

Section A tests

- (a) description, analysis (that is, the ability to break down and select relevant data), and synthesis (the ability to bring together and condense in a new form, information drawn from various sections of the text), for the purpose of answering a particular question.
- (b) the ability to support an argument based on reference to the text, a response to or opinion about a play, novel, short story.
- (c) an elementary awareness of the writer's craft (that is, of the writer as a person who employs various techniques in the shaping of the language and the presentation of human character and behaviour).
- (d) an ability to recognize and distinguish between qualities of feeling as presented in a particular text.
- (e) a grasp of concepts and values and an understanding of how these are manifested in literature.

Section B tests

- (a) the same skills as indicated for Section A. However, because of its focus on themes and the comparison of texts, Section B requires an equal measure of analysis but a greater effort at synthesis to answer questions adequately.
- (b) an appreciation of the social content and context of literature.

Skills and Aptitude Tested in Paper 02

This paper tests

- (a) comprehension.
- (b) awareness of the writer's craft (that is, the ability to say how a writer/poet/dramatist achieves his effect).

These skills require

- (a) 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 in the passage.
- (b) attention to dramatic devices, for example, stage direction and "props".
- (c) awareness of the relationship between action and motive.
- (d) awareness of the interaction among characters.

DETAILED COMMENTS

Paper 01

Section A – Set Texts – Questions 1 - 14

ROMEO AND JULIET

Question 1

This question required an understanding of a crucial moment in the dramatic action – the Capulet feast. Candidates needed to know the facts surrounding Romeo's presence at the feast of his father's sworn enemy, what transpires at the feast, and the dramatic significance of the scene.

This was the most popular question of the entire examination attracting responses from 55 per cent of candidates. Many candidates answered (a) and (b) satisfactorily – although far too many confused Mercutio with Benvolio – but lost marks in (c), which required them to say why this scene was dramatically significant.

Teachers and candidates are reminded that questions on Drama will, in one way or the another, test knowledge of dramatic significance.

Question 2

This question required an understanding of what is arguably the most memorable scene in the play.

Surprisingly only 8.2 per cent responded. Many candidates responded well to (a) and (b); but lost marks in (c), which tested their knowledge of dramatic significance.

Romeo and Juliet proved a popular choice (the second most popular text) and, hence, an appropriate text. However, there was quite a bit of film interference. Teachers and candidates are reminded that neither video nor film ought to replace the text, on which questions are set.

THE TAMING OF THE SHREW

Question 3

This question tested the candidates' knowledge of the final scene of the play in which the three most important couples are present. It involved identification, description of the test that Petruchio suggests, and the importance of Katherina's closing speech.

Nine per cent of the candidates answered this question and many gained full marks in (a) and (b), but lost marks in (c), which asked them to place Katherina's speech within the context of the entire comedy. There was, however, one perfect score on this question.

Question 4

As in the previous question, this one required candidates to know and understand a particular scene – the wedding day (Act 3, Scene 2). Candidates were asked to respond to Katherina's humiliation and anxiety at Petruchio's deliberate late arrival, to describe the choreographed appearance of a fantastically dressed Petruchio, riding the most lamentable nag/jade, and to comment on the hero's outrageous behaviour.

Only three per cent of the candidates attempted this question and there was no perfect score.

The Taming of the Shrew was not a popular text with candidates and teachers. This is not surprising, since it hardly works as text in 2004. Only the most skilful actors can pull it off on stage.

SAINT JOAN

Question 5

This question required candidates to respond to Dunois's initial appearance on stage. It expresses Dunois's love of art/poetry and his relationship with the heroine.

Only 2 per cent of the candidates chose this question and there was no perfect score. Most candidates did not respond well to part (c).

Question 6

This question tested candidates' understanding of events associated with the introduction of the Inquisition.

As was the case in 2003, Question 6 was again the least popular question of the examination. A mere 1.5 per cent of candidates chose it, and no candidate was able to score full marks.

Saint Joan was the least popular set book.

TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD

Question 7

Thirty-seven per cent of the candidates chose this question, which centered on the relationship between the children and Boo Radley, and the majority of scores were between 16 and 21. Candidates generally responded well to (a) and (b), but lost marks in (c). A number of candidates earned full marks in this question.

Question 8

This straightforward question, which focused on Atticus' character and the repercussions of his defence of Tom Robinson, elicited the best overall performance from candidates. Twenty-seven responses earned a perfect score, and the majority of scores were between 16 and 24.

To Kill a Mockingbird proved in the second year of this cycle to be the most popular set text. Its simple, straightforward, linear narrative proved irresistible to 73 per cent of the candidates.

WIDE SARGASSO SEA

Question 9

This question on how Antoinette and her husband respond to Dominica elicited responses from eight per cent of the candidates and there were many excellent responses, several of which earned perfect scores. Candidates performed well in part (a) and (b) but experienced difficulty in explaining what the reaction of Antoinette and her husband to Dominica tells the reader about the couple's relationship.

Question 10

This question was more popular than its counterpart, and attracted responses from almost 13 per cent of the candidates. Sections (a) and (b) were well handled, but (c) posed problems, no doubt because it required a synthesis of knowledge and interpretation.

With 20 per cent of the candidates choosing Wide Sargasso Sea, it became the third least popular set text. It is not an easy text at this level.

A WORLD OF PROSE

Questions 11 and 12

Question 11 was a popular question based on “The Two Grandmothers” and it was attempted by 33 per cent of the candidates. There were many excellent answers and a number of candidates earned perfect scores.

Question 12 on “Down Our Way” was much less popular than its counterpart. Both Questions 11 and 12 required a knowledge of only one short story, and this no doubt contributed to the quality of responses, as candidates were able to cope well with the requirements.

Questions 11 and 12 elicited responses from 42 per cent of the candidates, and A World of Prose continues to be an attractive option in Section A.

A WORLD OF POETRY

Questions 13 and 14

In Question 13, most candidates responded well to parts (a) and (b) but had difficulty responding to part (c), the significance of the persona/speaker. In Question 14, (a) and (c) posed problems for many candidates. There was only one perfect score among the responses to these questions.

Approximately 20 per cent of the candidates chose to answer Questions 13 and 14, 11 per cent less than in 2003. Happily, A World of Poetry continues to hold its own among set texts.

Section B – Themes – Questions 15 - 21

Question 15 – Love and Family Relationships

About 29 per cent of the candidates answered Question 15, and there were a fair number of very good responses. Candidates handled (a) more comfortably than (b). Surprisingly there was only one perfect score among the 5 243 responses. Choice of texts either positively or adversely affected performance. Repetition of texts was the downfall of many candidates.

Question 16 – Freedom

Out of the 4 020 candidates who chose to respond to Question 16, approximately 25 per cent scored more than 18 marks. While part (a) posed no real problems, part (b) proved a stiff challenge to candidates who were less comfortable with comparison than with description, as required in part (a). There were two perfect scores.

Question 17 – Heroism

Heroism perennially has been the most popular theme question. This year it proved to be the second most popular question of the entire examination, attracting responses from 39 per cent of the candidates. Candidates generally responded intelligently, but many had difficulty with (b), which demanded an illustration of the effect of heroism on a major character. Scores of 18 marks and over were gained by 22 per cent of the candidates. There were four perfect scores among 6 938 responses.

Question 18 – Power and Authority

This question elicited responses from 22 per cent of the candidates, only one of whom provided a perfect answer. Only 9.2 per cent of the candidates scored 18 or more.

Question 19 – Dreams and Aspirations

This question fell in popularity from 2003; only 28 per cent of candidates attempted it in 2004 compared with 40 per cent in the previous year. It, however, was well handled, and recorded the highest percentage of scores above 18 among the theme questions.

Question 20 – Women in Society

This question fell dramatically in popularity in 2004, in comparison to 2003. This is surprising in this age of feminism, liberation and the fact that the question encouraged candidates to demonstrate their understanding of how and why a female character triumphs in two of the texts studied. This question recorded the worst performance in the entire examination!

Question 21 – Attitudes to the Past

This question proved to be the second least popular theme question behind Question 20, and was attempted by seven per cent of the candidates. Only one candidate achieved a perfect score and as in previous years, (c) gave candidates the most difficulty.

The theme questions (15-21) should prove to be easier than Section A questions, since both themes and texts are known far in advance of the examination. It is difficult to understand why candidates do not perform better on these questions. While it is not wise or educational for teachers to encourage candidates to prepare full answers and regurgitate them on examination day, there is nothing to prevent teachers from ensuring that candidates know precisely how to structure an essay on a theme question. The present examination encourages and invites teachers and candidates to explore options. Since nothing is compulsory on the examination, candidates may choose as many as three questions from Section A. With theme and text(s) known, there is hardly an excuse for inadequate preparation. While teachers cannot vouch for candidates' familiarity with texts, they can and perhaps ought to provide model answers. There are, of course, inherent dangers in such a practice, but the advantages are likely to outweigh the disadvantages. At least candidates can be guided to correlate theme and text(s), since this is so often the key to the quality of response.

General

As mentioned on page 2, overall performance in 2004 remained stable. The drop in performance in Paper 02 was counterbalanced by an improved performance in Paper 01. Though no candidate wrote a perfect answer for either Question 1 or Question 2, 9.08 per cent of those answering Question 1 and 13.2 per cent of those answering Question 2, scored 16 or more.

In the questions on drama, teachers and candidates are reminded that "dramatic importance" is crucial to any proper appreciation of drama. It is really about structure and discovering what a particular scene is doing in its desired place and how this placement affects the play. At this level, the emphasis is more on particular scenes than on the entire play. Beginnings, middles, and endings are always crucial to drama, poetry, and prose fiction, and questions will reflect the truth of this observation.

Teachers are to be reminded that we are surely moving to an approach to literature that understands the three modes as related yet distinct. Questions will reflect in one way or another the need to appreciate how poetry functions as poetry and drama as drama. Questions on novels will reflect the need to understand the organic relationship between character, theme, setting and language.

Reading prose, drama, and especially poetry, aloud with sensitivity can go a long way towards appreciating literature. It can make the difference between merely responding to it and understanding how it works.

Paper 02

General Comments

In 2004, against the norm, there were more responses to the poem (Question 2) than to the prose excerpt (Question 1): 9 294 candidates chose Question 2, while 7 875 candidates responded to Question 1. Performance on Question 2 was marginally better than on Question 1.

There was no perfect total score in Paper 02, but there was a score of 28 in both questions. Thirteen per cent of the candidates scored 16 or higher.

Both passages required an understanding of how writers use language to describe and explore the world of ideas and emotions through imaginative structures.

Although the prose excerpt fictionalized Trinidadian/Caribbean history, both questions demanded of candidates an understanding of Standard English.

Candidates who were adept at applying this knowledge performed best.

More attention needs to be paid to identification and explanation of figures of speech. Candidates were able to recognize similes and metaphors, however few recognized examples of puns and paradoxes. Moreover, while candidates were able to identify the figure of speech, in many instances they were unable to explain how the figure of speech worked in the given context. This area of weakness is one we would like to see improve.

There is still a tendency to extrapolate when responding to a critical piece and candidates need to be reminded that they should confine themselves to responding to the given stimuli, rather than drawing from extra-textual sources. In using the question as a platform to preach, some candidates became sidetracked into irrelevance.

APPENDIX - 1

Question #	Text/Theme	No. of Responses	Percentage of Candidates	Percentage Scores of 18+	No. of Perfect Scores
1	Romeo and Juliet	9451	55	24.73	8
2		1409	8.21	21.29	9
3	Taming of the Shrew	1615	9.41	22.86	1
4		508	2.96	12.40	0
5	St. Joan	301	1.75	5.65	0
6		254	1.48	12.6	0
7	To Kill a Mockingbird	6415	37.38	47.78	11
8		6598	38.45	59.23	27
9	Wide Sargasso Sea	1330	7.75	44.75	16
10		2186	12.73	35.68	3
11	World of Prose	5740	33.45	24.75	12
12		1439	8.38	30.37	0
13	World of Poetry	830	4.83	9.53	1
14		2561	14.92	19.76	0
THEMES					
15	Love and Family Relationships	5243	30.55	12.13	1
16	Freedom	4020	23.42	24.74	2
17	Heroism	6942	40.45	21.61	4
18	Power and Authority	3544	20.65	9.2	1
19	Dreams and Aspirations	4841	28.21	37.38	5
20	Women in Society	981	5.71	4.79	0
21	Attitude to the Past	1276	7.43	12	1