
GCSE

ENGLISH LITERATURE

8702/1N Nineteenth Century Novel
Report on the Examination

8702
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General Introduction to the November Series

This has been another unusual exam series in many ways. Entry patterns have been very different from those normally seen in the summer, and students had a very different experience in preparation for these exams. It is therefore more difficult to make meaningful comparisons between the range of student responses seen in this series and those seen in a normal summer series. The smaller entry also means that there is less evidence available for examiners to comment on.

In this report, senior examiners will summarise the performance of students in this series in a way that is as helpful as possible to teachers preparing future cohorts while taking into account the unusual circumstances and limited evidence available.

Overview of Entry

The entry for this paper was very small, with fewer than 500 students sitting the exam. Responses to all texts were seen, but there were very few responses on texts other than *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* or *A Christmas Carol*. However, the quality of responses spanned the full range of the mark scheme, with questions eliciting some impressive ideas.

Overall, there was a greater proportion of briefer responses in this series than is traditionally seen. There was a noticeable number of responses dominated by comments on the extract with limited, if any, reference to the whole text. In these cases, comments were frequently generic, for example in question 1, the linking of elements of the weather in the extract just to the key words “disturbing and threatening” rather than to the context of the novel as a whole.

Comments on Individual Questions

The majority of answers seen were for *A Christmas Carol*, with *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* the most frequent alternative.

The question on *A Christmas Carol* focused on joy and happiness, with the extract drawn from Fezziwig’s Christmas party. Students were able to identify the imagery of light and associate this with Fezziwig’s character and then broaden this out, often to the Cratchit family and Fred as further examples of characters demonstrating joyful qualities. The most successful answers recognised this as a turning point for Scrooge in his journey towards redemption and were also able to contrast Scrooge with happy characters and use this to consider Dickens’ broader themes and ideas.

The question on *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* asked students to consider how Stevenson uses settings to “create a disturbing and threatening atmosphere”. Students engaged well with the extract, commenting in particular on the weather and the use of pathetic fallacy, considering how this developed the atmosphere of the extract. The more successful responses were able to make the connection between the atmosphere in this particular extract and the broader sense of tension and unease in the novel as a whole reflecting Jekyll’s secrecy, Hyde’s evil and the hypocrisy of society at the time. Other settings which were explored to good effect included: the doors to Jekyll’s residence; the night of Sir Danvers Carew’s murder; and the dark and labyrinthine nature of London in the novel as a whole.

For the remaining texts available there were some exceptional responses, including a very insightful response to *Pride and Prejudice*, comparing and contrasting how Austen characterises various relationships in the novel to explore attitudes towards romance.

A common feature of more successful responses is that they start with a thesis, outlining a broad response to the question, rather than beginning “In the extract...”. This not only helps students to engage with the themes and ideas of the texts, but also helps them to engage in a more agile manner with both the extract and the whole text.

Concluding Remarks

- Stronger responses are frequently characterised by having an opening thesis which demonstrates an overall response to the whole text and acknowledges the general focus of the question.
- To address AO2 effectively, it would be helpful for students to go beyond identifying words in isolation in the extract, and instead link them with the broader context of the character or whole text and the writer’s ideas.

Overall, students’ responses showed a clear understanding of the questions and an engagement with some challenging texts, characters and ideas.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.