

CARIBBEAN EXAMINATIONS COUNCIL

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

MAY/JUNE 2007

ENGLISH B

**ENGLISH B
GENERAL PROFICIENCY EXAMINATION
JUNE 2007**

GENERAL COMMENTS

In 2007, approximately 19,363 candidates wrote the examination. This examination, the second for the revised syllabus, showed a significant improvement in candidates' performance. In 2006, 44.68 per cent of the candidates achieved Grades I - III. This number increased significantly in 2007 with 70.26 per cent achieving Grades I - III.

Generally, candidates demonstrated an acceptable familiarity with the texts, and there was evidence of an increased personal involvement with the material and an emotional response to the conflicts and struggles being discussed.

Again this year, parts of questions that required simple recall were generally done well, but weaker candidates were not so competent when called on to analyse situations. Sections of questions dealing with dramatic devices or poetic devices were markedly less well done than those that required familiarity with the "story". Since this new syllabus is genre-based, it is important for teachers to guide students to examine dramatic and poetic devices and to be able to discuss their effectiveness. A large number of candidates simply omitted the part of the question requiring comments on dramatic or poetic devices.

Candidates need to be reminded of the importance of answering each part of the question, particularly in the prose fiction section where there is no sectionalizing to prompt them. Words such as "Comment on", "Identify", "Discuss", "Compare" require different responses, and "briefly" means just that.

Students need to be taught to focus on the specific requirements of the question and answer each part as thoroughly as possible with supporting evidence from the text – not to narrate the story, and not to write everything they know whether relevant or not.

Teachers are reminded that students may choose only one question from each section.

Intention of Questions

All questions are designed to test the specific skills listed on Page 25 of the syllabus:

Understanding

Knowledge of Text and Insight

- (i) relevance and adequacy of content
- (ii) relevance and accuracy of examples

Expression

Organization of Response

- (i) structure and development of responses
- (ii) clear and logical argument

Quality of Language

- (i) clarity and appropriateness of expression used
- (ii) mechanics of writing (sentence structure, grammar, punctuation, and spelling)

Skills and Aptitudes Tested in Paper 01

This paper tests

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

These skills require

- (i) 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
- (ii) attention to dramatic devices such as stage directions and "props"
- (iii) awareness of the relationship between action and motive
- (iv) awareness of the interaction among characters

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 a 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 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 2.
- (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.

Paper 01

Comments on Candidates' Performance

Question 1: Drama

Overwhelmingly, candidates demonstrated their understanding and appreciation of the immediacy of the drama, as they responded energetically to the episode. They recognized the need to infer the feelings of the characters from the stage directions as indicated by the question, and linked the evidence to the feelings of excitement, tension and anxiety. A major contribution of the study of literature is to enable students to name and distinguish emotions and feelings. Some candidates did not get beyond the cliché of 'having the spirit of carnival' or the 'carnival feeling'. Some demonstrated an inability to use evidence to support their estimate of Pa's importance in the household. Conclusions that Pa was the sole breadwinner cannot be supported by 'your father's costume take every cent we had.' Exercises to make inferences from evidence are invaluable in all genres. Thankfully, the vast majority of candidates were able to demonstrate mastery of this skill on this occasion. Determining the conflict in this scene required analysis of the evidence. Most candidates recognized the central point of conflict, and full marks, achieved by many, were awarded for identifying the underlying cause. Most candidates correctly identified excitement and tension as the best description of the atmosphere, but some did not use the evidence from the two main characters to justify their answer. The marks allocated to a question is a useful guide to the fullness of an expected answer. The purpose of Question 1 (e) was to test candidates' appreciation of the extract as a scene to be viewed on stage. A candidate could have scored three marks for any three of the following:

- the music;
- the humorous drunken song at the beginning;
- the quarrel between *Ursula* and *Marilyn* adding tension;
- the suspense wondering whether *Pa* will support *Marilyn* against *Ursula*;
- *Marilyn's* dancing;
- the contrast between the merriment outside and the tension within;
- the suspense wondering what exactly *Pa's* costume is for;
- the suspense wondering if *Marilyn* will get to play mas;
- any other reasonable answer focusing on dramatic qualities (effect on watching audience)

Many candidates had difficulty in distinguishing between the carnival excitement that happens unseen offstage and the anxiety that predominates onstage. Performance on the drama was considerably better than last year. The mean performance increased from 5.77 in 2006 to 10.59 in 2007.

Question 2: Poetry

The responses revealed that most candidates struggled with the experience of the poem this year. While most candidates correctly identified the 'arms' as bayonet-blade, bullet heads and cartridges or their synonyms, some candidates did not recognize this central idea and were therefore handicapped. The speaker was suggesting that the boy should examine the arms and understand the damage they can cause. Many candidates strained reasonable interpretation when they extrapolated that the boy was forced to be a heartless mass murderer. While most candidates were able to identify an example of personification, they were unable to comment adequately on its effectiveness. While some adept abstract-thinking poetry readers indicated courage, endurance and maturity as the things the boy lacks, many restated what was mentioned in the poem but found difficulty in explaining why his lacking them was significant. The use of the language of suggestion was tested in (e) but not many were able to identify appropriate phrases. Candidates could have scored the full two marks for any two of the following:

- His teeth seem for laughing round an apple

- To stroke
- Nuzzle in the hearts of lad - suggests cuddling
- Fingers supple
- Thickness of curls

Question 3: Prose

The delightful prose passage posed some difficulty for candidates. Most candidates were able to earn at least two marks by providing evidence from what they learnt about the narrator from the first three paragraphs. Evidence that the narrator and her sister were from a mixed cultural heritage required mention of both American and Haitian roots, and the passage abounds with evidence of cultural practices, values, beliefs, celebrations and cuisine. The cause of the conflict between Ma and the girls was represented by a specific event, their request to be pall bearers, which heightened the ongoing conflict of values between the generations. Many candidates identified the specific incident but ignored the underlying cause. Most candidates were able to identify cases of Ma's speech without the quotation marks, but the use of italics for emphasis, irony or sarcasm was not widely understood. Generally, candidates' inability to earn the maximum in responding to one way in which the father is significant reflects the need for a greater teaching focus on strategies of close reading of prose extracts, demonstrating knowledge of structure, point of view, contrast of characters, episode and theme elaboration, each of which could be exploited in this case.

Paper 02

General Comments on Candidates' Performance

Since two of the questions on this paper are comparative analyses, it is important for candidates to be trained in the skills of structuring a comparative essay. Candidates need to be instructed on how to read a question carefully, paying attention to each section, and, where applicable, noting the proportion of marks being awarded. **They should be encouraged to use the sections in the questions as a guide to structuring their essays, but should not present their response in segments—and certainly not with each segment on a separate page.** Vocabulary building is necessary; students need not merely to be able to identify an example of a character's typical behaviour or an example of mood shift, but should be able to *name* the character trait or mood that is being illustrated. Names of people and places should be correctly spelt, and problem spellings should be anticipated and prepared for. Correct spelling of words like *throne*, *soldier*, *prophecy*, *heir* can be taught, for example, when preparing candidates to answer a question on *Macbeth*.

For the Poetry section, it is important for candidates not only to identify and give an example of a figure of speech, but also to discuss its effectiveness in that poem.

For the Drama section, it is important for candidates not only to know in detail what takes place in any particular scene, but to be able to connect that scene with the entire play in terms of plot, theme, character revelation, mood and conflict.

Section A - Drama

Questions 1 - 4

Too many candidates attempted questions on both of the plays. Only one question may be selected from this section. Teaching should prepare candidates to discuss the relationship of a particular scene to the total effect of the play. Candidates need not merely to be able to recount the events or describe character; they should be able to comment on dramatic techniques such as contrast, irony, foreshadowing, suspense, etc., and, in modern plays, on the stage setting, use of lighting, music, costumes, and so on.

Candidates should be reminded that the segments in the questions are intended to guide in essay planning. Too many candidates ignore the instruction to write each answer in essay format.

MACBETH

Question 1

This question focused on the mental and moral deterioration of Macbeth during the course of the play. Candidates generally scored well in part (a), which asked for the circumstances and motive in four killings carried out or ordered by Macbeth. In part (b), where they were asked to find evidence of his mental and moral deterioration, some candidates were less confident, and many failed to differentiate between mental, on the one hand, and moral on the other. It was clear that many candidates could easily recall Macbeth's actions, but had not gone to the next stage of evaluating them. The final section tended to be poorly done: candidates knew when they felt admiration or sympathy for the protagonist, but were quite at sea when asked to comment on the effect of Shakespeare's strategy in manipulating our emotions. Time management was also a problem, and candidates need to be aware of the marks available for each section of the question.

Question 2

This was the less popular of the two Macbeth questions, and it was generally handled slightly less competently than Question 1. This may have been because it focused on a small, more specific, portion of the play. Candidates were able to outline the events in the scene identified, but had difficulty naming the various moods created – possibly a matter of limited vocabulary rather than of insensitivity. Most candidates managed to show the contrast between Lady Macbeth and Lady Macduff, though weaker candidates did not understand “contrasted”, and tried instead to find similarities between the two women. Most candidates were able to connect the events in the scene to Macduff's role as avenger in the final battle.

THE GLASS MENAGERIE

Question 3

This question focused on Amanda's character and her role in the tragic events in this play. Candidates were mostly able to recall in detail the incident referred to in the prompt quotation. In the second section of the question, they were generally able to illustrate Amanda's character traits, but not to name them. This inability appears to result from limited vocabulary, and, perhaps, non-familiarity with the word “traits”. The final section, in which candidates were required to show how Amanda's character traits contribute to the tragedy within her family, was poorly done on the whole. Again, the pattern emerged that candidates were able to handle recall questions, but were weaker when it came to analysis.

Question 4

This question required the candidates to discuss the psychological implications of family relationships in the play. Most candidates were able to give evidence of Laura's inferiority complex. Most were less comfortable applying the comment to Tom – some candidates apparently being thrown off course by the fact that Tom is not present when the comment is made. Certainly detecting a sense of inferiority in Tom takes more insight than detecting the same problem in Laura, and Tom, of course, fights hard to preserve his self-esteem. Predictably, part (c), requiring a comment on “significance and dramatic effect”, was poorly answered. Candidates need to step back from the words and actions of any particular scene and ask themselves how the part contributes to the whole; they must be able to discuss the dramatic impact of any specific moment in the play. Terms like *irony*, *climax*, *foreshadowing* must be part of the candidate's working vocabulary.

Section B – Poetry

Questions 5 - 6

General comments

There is room for improvement in the teaching of poetry. For Question 6, there were too many scripts in which candidates totally misinterpreted both poems. For Question 5, some candidates submitted opinions based on experiences extraneous to the poems. Many candidates scored their good marks on the (a) and (b) parts of the poetry questions, but were very weak on the (c) part, the part that tests for understanding of the genre.

Candidates tended to be unable to name devices used in the poems, or, if they knew the name of a device, were unable to provide an example of that device. Others named a device and gave an example, but were unable to comment on how the device functioned in that particular poem. Many candidates merely quoted parts of the poem that were particularly striking and commented on them, but were not able to actually name the device being used.

It is important that students be taught the basic vocabulary of poetry, be able to identify and NAME figures of speech (e.g. simile, metaphor, alliteration), be able to identify basic structural devices (repetition, rhyme) and be able to explain HOW in particular poems these devices work to create certain meanings and effects.

The classroom experience of a poem should include discussion of point of view, tone, allusion, imagery, irony, contrast, the appropriateness of the title, and other such devices.

Question 5

Candidates clearly enjoyed these two poems and wrote with enthusiasm. However, they need to be taught the skills of writing a comparative analysis. Candidates tended to deal with first one and then the other poem, with little attention to comparison. Some candidates misinterpreted item b) ii (Comment on the effects on the children), and offered a general discussion of the benefits of discipline instead of confining their observations to the content of the poems. The section on poetic devices proved the most challenging.

Question 6

Generally well done. Again, the first two sections of the question, which required recall and comprehension, were handled far better than section c), which asked for a discussion of poetic devices. It is important for candidates to be able to identify devices/techniques used by the poet, and to discuss their effectiveness in the poem being analysed. Fewer candidates attempted this question than did Question 5, but performance in Question 6 was slightly better.

Section C – Prose Fiction

Questions 7-12

The Examining Committee learnt that not all examination centres had distributed the erratum sheet that accompanied this year's examination paper (Paper 2). To deal with this problem, a decision was made to accept answers to any of the six questions (four on the original paper and two on the erratum sheet).

In the comments that follow, the questions on the erratum sheet are re-numbered 11 and 12 to prevent confusion.

General comments

Candidates need to be reminded that they may select their texts only from the four listed in the syllabus. Texts from the previous syllabus may not be used, nor may plays from either this or the former syllabus. Many candidates wrote on the “novels” *Macbeth* and *The Glass Menagerie*.

Candidates must be taught to focus on the requirements of the question and not merely retell the story. They should avoid trying to answer all four questions in one essay.

The purpose of the questions in this section is to encourage comparison—whether or not that word is used explicitly in the question, so students need to be taught strategies for structuring their essay to bring out points of similarity and difference.

Since the questions on prose fiction are not sectionalized, candidates need to be guided by teachers on how to structure their essays. Many candidates also need guidance on correct paragraphing.

Candidates should be encouraged to study all four of the novels on the syllabus, and should be taught to use their reading time to select a question carefully. Story-telling should be avoided, proper names should be correctly spelt, and titles should be underlined.

Question 7

This question allowed candidates to explore the dynamics of relationships. The better candidates understood that the question required them to see the positive and negative elements in ONE relationship, and they handled this well. Weaker candidates tended to discuss one relationship that was “joyous and fulfilling”, and a different relationship that was “sorrowful and burdensome”—missing the point of the question.

Question 8

This question focused on the difficulties of growing up as experienced by a major character in both a West Indian and a non-West Indian novel. Some candidates ignored the instruction to focus on a major character, and selected a minor figure instead. The main weaknesses in responses to this question were story-telling instead of analysis and failure to structure the essay as a comparison.

Question 9

There were not many superior responses for this question. Many candidates were able to identify family relationships but could not say how the relationship affected a major character. In fact, many candidates gave confusing answers and failed to focus on the question. Some candidates limited their discussion to a relationship of the major character with only one other family member, and this sometimes negatively affected their scores.

Question 10

Candidates were asked to discuss ways in which a major character in each of the texts selected was affected by the illness or death of someone close to him/her. The more thoughtful responses focused on the psychological effects of dealing with sickness or death of someone close while the weaker responses confined their discussion to physical changes that resulted. In the latter case, essays tended to slide into story-telling instead of analysing the deeper consequences of coping with these difficult experiences.

Question 11

Candidates who understood what was meant by “landscape” tended to do very well on this question; they had evidently been well prepared. Too many candidates simply did not know what the term means, and used it synonymously with physical or social environment – especially those who wrote on *Crick Crack Monkey*. Many candidates wrote about the behaviour of characters rather than about changes in attitude and personality. Some very good responses dealt with the evident symbolism in the landscape in, for instance, *Green Days by the River* and *A Separate Peace*. Responses on *The Pearl* and *Crick Crack Monkey* were not generally very good.

Question 12

This was by far the most popular prose question. The question invited candidates to consider the way a major character copes with a challenge during the course of the novel, but still has more problems to deal with as the novel draws to an end. Misinterpretations of the question abounded, with many candidates dealing with one challenge faced early in the novel and several more towards the end of the novel. Responses that ranged over a series of challenges tended to fall into story-telling. Some candidates selected characters that were inappropriate to the discussion: Leper, Juana, Tantie, for instance. Nevertheless, some of the better candidates came to grips with the requirements of the question, and discussed the fact that, even after dealing with one big challenge, Gene has to go on living with his guilty memories, Kino has to rebuild his life after the loss of his son, Tee has no sense of identity as she migrates to England, and Shell faces many difficulties as he enters married life with Rosalie.

Appendix 1 shows the Analysis of the candidates’ responses.

General

Overall performance in 2007 showed a significant improvement over that of 2006. In Paper 01, the drama question was done better than either poetry or prose, which seemed to present equal difficulty to candidates. In Paper 02, candidates performed similarly in each of the three genres.

APPENDIX – 1

Question #	Text	No of Responses	Percentage of Candidates
Drama			
1	Macbeth	11148	57.5
2		2191	11.3
3	Glass Menagerie	1455	7.5
4		4592	23.7
Poetry			
5	World of Poetry	11594	59.8
6		7624	39.3
Prose Fiction			
	*		
7		4424	22.8
8		4023	20.7
9		981	5.0
10		1185	6.1
11		914	4.7
12		7788	40.2

*Students were required to select one West Indian novel and one non-West Indian novel for comparison from the following:

West Indian

Crick Crack Monkey
Green Days by the River

Merle Hodge
Michael Anthony

Non West Indian

A Separate Peace
The Pearl

John Knowles
John Steinbeck