

**CARIBBEAN EXAMINATIONS COUNCIL**

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

**MAY/JUNE 2010**

**ENGLISH B  
GENERAL PROFICIENCY**

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## **GENERAL COMMENTS**

The Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) Examination in English B 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 10 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 this 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 choose two appropriate poems from which 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 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.

The 2010 examination was the second testing of the new cycle of texts. There was a noticeable increase in appreciation, application and overall results in both Papers 01 and 02.

## **DETAILED COMMENTS**

### **Paper 01 – Short Answer**

Paper 01 assesses the following skills:

- i) Comprehension
- ii) 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

There was a dramatic improvement in the performance of candidates on this paper this year.

The mean scores for Paper 01 for the period 2008–2010 in the table below show the improvement in performance.

#### Mean Scores for the Period 2008–2010

<b>Paper 01</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>
DRAMA	6.18	7.02	11.00
POETRY	5.54	4.9	10.49
PROSE	5.03	8.43	7.47

Candidates demonstrated an excellent grasp of the principles of literary appreciation and added their personal and heartfelt responses to the excerpts/texts in the three genres. Even with the Prose Profile, where the mean mark recorded a disappointing 7.47, most candidates displayed their imaginative flair and creative interpretations, although these were ponderously misapplied to the comic passage which required light treatment.

The personal involvement from candidates was evident in their responses. It is clear that teachers have taken the advice from previous reports and the sensitization sessions on the revised syllabus and added new life to the study of Literature.

#### Question 1

For Question 1, Drama, most candidates earned one of the two marks for Part (a). Although they were able to identify the marriage as the main concern of the scene, and which gave them 1 mark, many candidates did not mention the tension or disagreement among the women. This question required candidates to form a total picture of not just the event but also the conflict of the scene.

However, for Part (b), which assessed candidates understanding of the use of stage directions, the majority of candidates were able to earn full marks. Candidates were able to competently demonstrate what the stage directions revealed about the characters feelings and provided the relevant supporting evidence to earn full marks.

The majority of candidates earned the total score for Parts (c), (d) and (e). Part (c) required candidates to quote a line which showed tension in the scene and to explain the tension. Part (d) was a question on characterization which focused on Mama. Candidates had to support their answer with one speech and one stage direction. This question was mastered.

Part (e) was another characterization question which focused on the character, Jenny. Again, candidates handled the question quite competently.

### Question 2

For Question 2, Poetry, most candidates were able to earn full marks for Parts (a), (c) and (e), but only a few achieved the total score in (b) and (d).

Part (a) asked candidates to identify three aspects of the poem that would appeal to a Caribbean person. Candidates were able to competently respond to this question. In Part (c) candidates were asked to identify in what way stanza four was different from the first three stanzas. In previous years, candidates had experienced difficulty when responding to questions which assessed their ability to recognize difference or contrast. This was not the case with this question. For Part (e), candidates were able to identify the images of sound and were able to indicate what impressions of the sea were created by the images.

However, candidates' responses to Parts (b) and (d) reinforce the view that figurative devices and their effectiveness continue to be challenging to students. Teachers need to find innovative ways of showing students how writers use the different figurative devices to create the effect they want in their work.

### Question 3

The overall mean for Question 3 indicated that Prose Fiction was not well done. While most candidates were able to score full marks in several parts of Questions 1 and 2, most candidates did not score full marks on any of the parts of Question 3. Part (c) proved most challenging. Candidates could not effectively identify and discuss the comical element in the passage. Expected responses were *exaggeration (the gestures and costumes); contrast as for instance, the big, strong woman and the seemingly small, old, frail man; the diction and pantomime*. A more careful reading of the passage would have assisted candidates in responding to the comic elements of the passage. Candidates did not seem to be able to picture this woman who looked like a German warrior.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PAPER 01**

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. In the case of this year's prose passage, the vast majority of candidates were unable to discern the comic element that dominated the extract. It appears that candidates conceive Literature as a ponderous study of only deep and serious concerns. Teachers need to help students expand that notion to embrace the more immediately pleasurable elements of the comic in Literature and life.

While in this paper no marks are formally awarded for the use of language, teachers are encouraged to offer students parallel Standard English constructions to the dialect responses that students offer to the questions. Too often, candidates' admissible responses to questions are inaccessible to those who do not share knowledge of their dialect. We therefore recommend that teachers give students the feedback on the Standard English translation of their correct responses to the questions.

More importantly, however, is the need for teachers to confidently build on their obviously successful attempts to have the students offer and defend, with evidence from the text, their varied interpretations and emotional responses to the texts they read. This prioritizing of students' autonomous thought, bolstered by their obligation to produce the textual evidence for their conclusions is at the heart of the critical and creative thinking that the study of Literature is meant to engender.

## Paper 02 – Essay Questions

The following are the 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 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 crafts (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)
- 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.

### Drama – The Merchant of Venice

#### Question 1

The Shakespeare questions yielded almost two-thirds of the total responses for the drama section. For Question 1, candidates demonstrated knowledge of the casket scenes. However, except for Portia's response to Bassanio, they appeared somewhat vague about Portia's response to the other suitors. There was also some amount of confusion, about the inscriptions on the caskets. Part (c), (How does Shakespeare show us that the casket scene with Bassanio is important to the play as a whole?) was by far the most challenging area of the question. Acceptable responses dealt with the dramatic effect such as *the tension; the building of suspense; and the contrast with the other scenes portraying Morocco and Arragon, by way of its romantic element*. Candidates were also expected to make the link to the entire plot, that is, *by guessing right, Bassanio is now able to marry Portia and as a result gets involved in Antonio's case*. Connections could have been made to the *ring plot* as well. This portion of the question aimed to assess candidates' understanding of the significance of Bassanio's victory to the development of the play, thematically, structurally and dramatically. The better prepared candidates produced well-developed essays and while no one scored full marks (35), seven candidates were able to score 34. The mean for this question was 16.31.

#### Question 2

There was a certain element of comfort and ease in terms of responding to the details required in Question 2. Candidates were able to describe the money lending scene with Antonio and Shylock, Part (a). However, Part (b) which asked for two techniques which make the scene exciting proved to be more challenging. Candidates experienced some amount of difficulty in identifying the techniques and further, to link these to **how** they made the scene exciting. By merely relating the scene, candidates generally did not spend enough time discussing or showing **how** language for instance was used (for example, irony, pun) or how argument was used, or even the

presentation of Shylock (his slow, methodical, and deliberate language that aggravates Antonio) and Antonio. Part (c), which asked candidates to *comment on how the scene brings out one issue or theme in the play* might have been better handled if candidates had demonstrated understanding of the word *issue* and *theme*. Many responses simply regurgitated the plot and others did not effectively link the scene to the play as a whole. Candidates who mentioned race, religion, prejudice, the bond, values, did not often provide enough textual evidence.

This question performed slightly better than Question 1. Eight candidates scored full marks. The mean for the question was 17.70.

## **Fences**

### Question 3

Question 3 was fairly well done. Part (a), Troy's confession and Rose's response to it which was required was quite familiar to candidates. On the whole, the candidates handled this part of the question very well, although the tendency was to re-tell the plot. For Part (b), even though candidates were asked to discuss three ways in which the relationship changed, some responses strayed from the Troy/Rose relationship. The final part of the question was well done by most candidates who attempted this question. They often explored wider implications with finesse. There were some though, who summarized the plot instead of, for instance, discussing one of the symbolic meanings of the fence; that is, *keeping family in*, which underscores the issue of faithfulness.

Two candidates scored full marks on this question. This question also had the highest mean for the section. The mean for this question was 18.14.

### Question 4

Candidates were able to describe the chosen relationship very well. They were not, however, so effective in commenting on one dramatic device used to present the relationship, Part (b). Devices that could have been used are as follows: *the symbolism of the fence and its ironic function (of keeping in and keeping out, and the self-destructive nature of the relationship between Troy and Rose); contrast; irony; imagery as in the garden image, and the game*. Part (c) was handled reasonably well as candidates were able to identify and discuss issues/themes such as infidelity, communication and sexuality quite competently.

No candidates scored full marks on this question. However, one candidate scored 34 and 13 scored 33. The mean for this question was 16.54.

## **Poetry**

### Question 5

Candidates' performance on this question was fair. The named poems in Question 5 were "A Contemplation Upon Flowers" and "God's Grandeur". Part (a) asked candidates to explain two lessons learned by the speaker by looking at Nature. The better able candidates performed remarkably well on this question. However, the weaker candidates deviated quite a bit from the lessons learnt. There was also some amount of confusion with the poems specified in the question and others listed in the syllabus. Candidates made reference to poems such as, "God's Work" confusing it with "God's Grandeur", and "Travelling Through the Dark" instead of "A Contemplation Upon Flowers". In instances when it appeared that some candidates could not relate the title of the poems to Nature which was required for Part (b), they repeated the material used in Part (a). Some candidates missed opportunities to discuss the impact of words in the titles and what they evoke, such as *contemplation, flowers* and *grandeur*. Many failed to make the significant connection to the **importance** of Nature.

Although “God’s Grandeur” does not mention Nature, it mentions God. Nature is important only because of God; it is God’s glory that is manifested in Nature and renews it. It was heartening to see that some candidates argued along this vein.

Candidates were expected to focus either on diction or devices to answer Part (c). The word *illustrate* might have caused some amount of uncertainty in responses. Generally, there were some verbose explanations about nature as a whole, omitting obvious responses such as trans for “A Contemplation Upon Flowers”– “God’s Grandeur” personification, rhyme, diction and for similes, comparison, repetition, internal rhyme Too often, responses identified the choice of word but without textual support or did not indicate the speaker’s **feeling**.

Eleven candidates scored full marks on this question. The mean for this question was 15.83.

### Question 6

Question 6 is the general question and candidates are required to choose two suitable poems from the prescribed list to answer the question set. Candidates seemed to have a strong preference for this kind of question as it yielded almost two-thirds of the responses. The storytelling element resonated well with candidates who sensibly and sensitively chose appropriate poems for discussion. Popular choices were “Coolie Mother”, “For my Mother”, and “Richard Cory”. Part (a) was well handled as candidates were able to outline the storyline in selected poems. It must be noted that candidates were not penalized for choosing lyrical poems such as “God’s Grandeur” as the burden was on the explanation. For example, the response could suggest how the speaker is looking around him and thinking about how Nature tells its own story of how humans fail to understand the meaning of Nature.

Responding to why each poet finds it important to tell that particular story, Part (b), candidates demonstrated some level of analysis and carved out spaces for personal inputs, but weaker candidates repeated material already used in Part (a), returning as it were, to storytelling. Part (c), proved to be the most challenging as candidates were asked to discuss one device each poet used to make the story enjoyable. Some candidates indentified devices but could not show **how** these made the poems enjoyable. In some instances, devices were merely explained or defined and not **applied** to the question.

Like Question 5, eleven candidates scored full marks on this question. The mean for this question was 18.41.

### **Prose Fiction**

#### Question 7

This was a very popular question; approximately, one-third of the candidates attempted it. What some candidates missed was the fact that it was not an absolute statement. The question asked for the **extent** to which the statement was true. Superior responses tied the authors’ technique with the thematic issue and made allowances for the view that friendship might not always heal. Common selections were Beka and Toysie and Billy and Kes.

Thirty-one candidates scored full marks for this question. The mean for the question was 18.68

#### Question 8

Question 8 required a comparison of the authors’ portrayal of hope. This was not a popular choice. This may have been because in making the comparison explicit, the question asked for more than mere discussion or narration. Weaker attempts focused only on hope, with little or no knowledge of tragedy. Again, candidates who

chose *Beka Lamb* and *A Kestrel for a Knave* had strong arguments that provided fruitful discussions either via characters or writer's craft or a combination of both.

While this question was not popular, many of the candidates who attempted it provided some well-developed and superior essays. This question produced the highest mean for the entire examination, that of 19.22. Two candidates scored full marks.

#### Question 9

This was the least popular question in this section. The question specifically focused on narrative techniques (signalled by "Show how the writer presents ..."). Candidates, for the most part, resorted to storytelling of instances of injustice in selected texts. However, superior and good responses focused on the use of *contrast as in race, class and gender; symbols such as the church, school, the teacher, David's father; tone as in the satirical ways in which fanaticism is explored in The Chrysalids*, for instance, and setting in the texts, to indicate instances of injustice.

Questions 8 and 9 had direct reference to writer's craft and is may be why they were not popular among candidates.

This mean for Question 9 was 15.00. No candidate scored full marks (35) or even 34. Four candidates achieved a score of 33.

#### Question 10

Question 10 was one of the more popular choices; approximately one third of the candidates attempted it. The question focused on the difficulties faced by a major character in search of personal freedom. Narration was popular but stronger responses acknowledged the *political context of colonialism* in *Beka Lamb* for instance, and *its impact on the personal*. Those who selected *The Hummingbird Tree* discussed for instance, *the stranglehold of class, race and gender*. Responses for *The Chrysalids* discussed *David's struggle to be free from his tyrannical and fanatical father. Billy's entrapment in his social class and dysfunctional home environment and low expectations from society*, were common responses for those who selected *A Kestrel for a Knave*.

Two candidates achieved the maximum score on this question. The mean for this question was 16.64.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PAPER 02**

1. Text selection and text choice must be given serious consideration. Sometimes poor textual choice limits the depth of the discussion and textual evidence needed for strong arguments.
2. Many candidates lost marks because they crossed genres for example, using a Drama text to answer the question in the Prose Fiction section. No marks can be awarded in such instances as this a genre-specific examination.
3. The tendency to narrate, evident in responses in the Prose Fiction section, continues to weaken the analytical element in essays.

4. Teachers are encouraged to continue to reinforce and teach essay-writing skills, strengthen vocabulary, grammar, paragraphing and sentence construction. They are encouraged to find opportunities to give small writing tasks (even a paragraph at a time) to assist weaker students such as
  - exercises which target introductory paragraphs
  - finding textual evidence to develop one point.
5. Even as students are encouraged to see other versions of the texts under study, they must be constantly reminded that only the texts, as they appear on the syllabus, are being tested (and not the movie version, for instance).
6. Students should know the skills required when they are asked to *define, discuss, describe, determine, comment on, or show*. Teachers must prepare students in this area.
7. While it was clear that students were exposed to hearing and or reading the poems, for instance, teachers are encouraged to take them one step further; they should be empowered to master the language to *describe, explain* and *analyse* with greater clarity those experiences shared and gained through listening and speaking.
8. Teachers must remind students of the potential of Literature. It is not merely a tool or an instrument of the writers' style, but is also the 'lived' experience. Literature can help students to explore, question, form judgments and reinforce certain values and attitudes. This dimension, the kind of applicability, is what is sometimes captured in superior scripts.