

English B

SECTION B – POETRY

Answer ONE question in this section.

- 6.** Choose TWO poems that you have studied, in which something OR someone is admired.
- (a) Describe what OR who is admired. **(8 marks)**
- (b) Identify and discuss how the poet uses ONE poetic device in EACH poem to show this admiration. **(8 marks)**
- (c) Which poem do you find more appealing in its presentation of admiration? Use evidence from the poem to support your answer. **(9 marks)**

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Admiration is the mental expression of affection towards someone or something due to our cognizance of the deeds or qualities of this individual or thing. In the poems, 'For My Mother (May I Inherit Half Her Strength)' by Sonia Goodison and 'A Contemplation Upon Flowers' by Henry King, we see a person and an object, respectively, receiving admiration from the respective personas due to their characteristics.

In 'For My Mother', Goodison attributes admiration to her mother who has devoted her adult life to securing the well-being of her household, both her husband and children. She is most unselfish and extremely tolerant (what may be considered her mental strength). Her tolerance or mental resilience ~~is~~ is alluded to in the line where the persona makes reference to her father's funeral :

"My mother ... buried him dry-eyed".

Immediately ~~after~~ ^{mother's} after, her ~~unselfishness~~ ^{unselfishness} and devotion to her children is praised by the mention of :

"Her hands grown coarse with rearing nine children."

In 'Contemplation Upon Flowers', the persona admires the flowers for their qualities of 'creativity, acceptance and willingness with regards to

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fulfilling their ~~destiny~~ destiny. He, then, commences to juxtapose this with his own reluctance.

"You [~~flowers~~] do obey your months and times.

But I would have it ever spring... never die,

Nor think of such a thing."

He admires ~~flowers~~ for being content with their cyclical pattern - an art which still eludes him.

In the poem 'For My Mother', Goodison vividly uses imagery, coupled and interwoven with repetition. This is to emphasize and envision the type of industrious attitude her mother displayed by carrying out numerous activities successfully simultaneously:

"She breast-fed while she sewed and
she sat in - judge over all our disputes
while she sewed."

The poet is, obviously, in awe of her mother's ability to tend to all these tasks without attaining failure in any, and so too are the readers.

In the poem 'A Contemplation Upon Flowers', King skillfully employs the device of personification. He attributes human-like quality to the flowers and this may be deemed to be done as flowers have reasoned and accepted that their purpose is to beautify and then return to their "bed of earth."

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Note that the skill of reasoning is only bestowed upon humans - the most intelligible of God's creation who still ~~have~~ encounter difficulties accepting their purpose. In this regard, since flowers have subjected themselves to God's design, it is safe to assume they are logical and so he petitions flowers to:

"Teach [him] so that his breath

May sweeten and perfume his death."

He turns to ~~manmade objects~~ ^{other living beings (apart from humans)} for education.

However, despite the rightfully deserved admiration given to flowers, we realize that they have no choice but to embrace their fate, in contrast to humans. Hence, 'For My Mother' is more compelling of admiration as her mother willingly chose to display the qualities which earned her daughter's admiration. For example:

"She pawned her machine for my sister's
Senior Cambridge Fees
And the pain she bore with the eyes of
a queen."

Hence, her mother's naturally exuded unselfishly love and bravery - qualities which few humans possess - is most worthy of admiration.

Therefore, both ~~manmade~~ ^{object} and living beings earn human admiration, however, the extent to which it is deserved is based on the extent to

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Exemplar responses to CXC CSEC English B Paper 020 2011

The CSEC English syllabus outlines the skills that are tested by the English B examination. Four critical skills that are outlined by the syllabus are the testing of (i) description (*the outlining of relevant content*), analysis (the ability to break down, select and comment on the significance of 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); (ii) the ability to communicate informed opinions and judgements in well-structured, analytical responses in oral and written form using the vocabulary of literary criticism; (iii) the ability to recognise 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) and (iv) the ability to respond to West Indian and other Literatures in English: novels, short stories, poems and plays; to make rational and sensitive appraisal of value judgements, states of consciousness and other concepts explored in literature, and relate these to everyday living.

In short students are expected to:

- demonstrate the ability to describe or outline relevant content
- analyse, that is, break down, select and comment on significant relevant details
- synthesize, that is, appropriately select relevant information from different sources and organize it coherently in response to a particular question
- comfortably and fluently write about literary works using the language of literary criticism
- recognise the writer's use of techniques and devices to effectively convey issues, thoughts and observations
- respond to the various issues and ideas explored in literature and demonstrate an understanding of how these reflect, elucidate and relate to everyday life.

These skills represent, to a significant extent, the expectations regarding students' abilities once they are thoroughly prepared to study and respond to literature. More specifically, students who are so prepared are expected to demonstrate (in their responses) understanding through knowledge of text and insight which includes their having adequate and relevant content, and their selecting relevant and accurate examples. Of equal importance is their expression which takes in properly organized responses which are appropriately structured and developed, have clear and logical argument, and use language which includes clear and appropriate expression and show competence in the mechanics of writing (sentence structure, grammar, punctuation, and spelling).

The essays students write are therefore evaluated in the context of these skills outlined by the syllabus and helpful analyses of students' work will be useful if guided by the parameters outlined in these skills in the syllabus.

Two essays written by candidates in response to Questions 6 (Poetry) and 7 (Prose Fiction) on the 2011 CSEC English B paper will be analyzed in the context outlined above.

Question 6 – Poetry

Question six in this year's examination sought to give candidates a choice both in terms of the range of poems they could choose from and the latitude through which they had to respond. It required them to demonstrate knowledge of the poems by focusing on the thing or person admired in the poem, explain how the devices contributed to conveying the type of admiration they identified in, and respond to how the poem they chose resonated with them in terms of its presentation of admiration. In this section, it was expected that a meaningful response would identify issues such as the nature of the admiration and the reason for it, the techniques and devices used to convey the idea of admiration and a justification of why each aspect identified made the poem appealing to them.

As is expected in any good response, the candidates were expected to use relevant and adequate content and relevant and accurate examples to support the views presented. This question demanded that candidates demonstrate a clear understanding of both the issues raised in the question and show an intimate understanding of the poem by adducing meaningful examples to support and establish arguments proffered (description, analysis and synthesis). It was also expected that the essay will be organized in coherent paragraphs that fluently transition from one idea to the next with appropriately written introduction and conclusion. Candidates were expected to observe the appropriate grammatical and mechanical conventions.

Candidate's Response to Question 6

This candidate produced an excellent response to this question. The syllabus seeks to develop the skills of understanding which take into account knowledge of text and insight, and expression which takes into account organization of response and quality of language. This essay is an excellent example of the skills assessed. Relevance and adequacy of content and relevance and accuracy of examples are the major skills that a candidate needs to demonstrate under knowledge and insight. The response will be analysed in relation to these two areas as outlined in the syllabus.

Candidates were expected to (a) Describe who or what is admired, in (b) Identify and discuss how a poetic device is used in each poem to convey admiration and in (c) Say which poem is more appealing in its presentation of admiration and why. The question is clear about the focus the candidate needs to have.

This candidate has drawn on relevant and adequate content to respond to the question and in addition has drawn relevant and accurate examples to support the response. In the second paragraph, the candidate identifies the mother in Lorna Goodison's "For My Mother (May I

Inherit Half Her Strength)" as the person worthy of admiration. Her devotion to her family, her unselfishness, her tolerance or mental resilience are all identified as reasons for choosing the mother as a subject of admiration. "Tolerant" and "unselfish" are both appropriate and adequate descriptions of the mother's qualities that make her admirable. In addition, this candidate seeks to support his/her point by quoting from the poem, lines that are relevant to the descriptions given. They accurately illustrate the descriptions outlined by the candidate.

The candidate treats the poem "A Contemplation Upon Flowers" by Henry King in a similar manner. The candidate identifies "bravery", "acceptance" and "willingness" as qualities to admire. The candidate also appropriately highlights the contrast between the persona's attitude to death, with that of the flowers as a way of strengthening the reason for the admiration of the flowers. The example adduced by the candidate appropriately and accurately illustrates the courage of the flowers in contrast to that of the persona. The candidate's use of such words as "persona" and his/her identification of the technique of contrast which highlights more clearly the reason the flowers are worthy of admiration are testimony to the knowledge and skills of analysis. The use of the language of poetry and criticism is an indication of the comfort with which this candidate approaches a literary response.

The second part of the question which challenges candidates to demonstrate an understanding of how techniques are used to convey ideas is handled very well by the candidate. For the Goodison poem, the candidate identifies repetition and imagery as the techniques for discussion. The candidate speaks of the poet using imagery, coupled and interwoven with repetition and goes on to adduce the repetition of "while she sewed" as the evidence on which the assertion regarding the use of techniques is based. Listing a number of tasks done by the mother while she sews allows the candidate to appropriately conclude that both the poet and readers are "in awe at her mother's ability to tend to these tasks" and draw our attention to the effectiveness of imagery interwoven with repetition in conveying why the mother was worthy of admiration.

Similarly, the candidate handles very well the use of technique in King's "A Contemplation Upon Flowers". Identifying personification as the device that conveys admiration, the candidate asserts that the flowers acceptance of death through a seeming process of reasoning is by itself elevating the flowers because the skill of reasoning is a special human quality. Through this process of reasoning, the flowers unlike human beings accept their fate as God's design. The candidate highlights the contrasting response to death of human beings who in the example drawn on must submit as a student to death who must "teach (him) so that his breath /May sweeten and perfume his death". What is demonstrated by this candidate is an insightful response to how device is used as he/she is able to appropriately identify the device and explain how it highlights the way in which the flowers are worthy of admiration by contrasting its response to death with that of the persona. Importantly, this candidate's ability to draw from life and relate these experiences to an understanding of literature enhances the quality of the insight he/she provides in response to the question.

In the candidate's personal response, the coherence between the earlier points made and the choice of which poem is more appealing is well established. This kind of synthesis and economy of language makes this response a delight to read as it is clear that this candidate's knack for reading and responding to literature is sound. To establish the argument for which is more worthy of admiration, the candidate draws on the fact that the flowers have no choice in their death and pretty much reasons that they would have had to accept their fate anyway and contrasts this with the fact that the mother in Goodison's poem had a choice and chose to be unselfish. While the earlier point regarding the personification of the flowers is being diminished in some way, we see a process of reasoning in this candidate that seeks to establish clear premises on which a conclusion is being made about which is more impressive in its presentation of admiration. The candidate's reasoning does not ignore the reality that human choices are difficult and while flowers might be lauded for their natural propensity to accept death, the power of choice in human beings is worthy of admiration especially when they are as difficult as the mother's in Goodison's poem. This candidate again demonstrates an understanding of life as being about difficult choices and places value on the difficult choice made by a mother. The skills of analysis and synthesis are clearly demonstrated as this candidate again pulls together values in life to respond to ideas explored in literature and makes a meaningful judgement about an issue presented in the question.

In summary, this candidate has clearly identified the relevant ideas to respond appropriately to what the question has asked, adduced appropriate and accurate examples to support these ideas and very importantly takes us through a clear and fluent process of reasoning that shows that he or she is clear about what an insightful and mature handling of an English B question requires. The essay is also organised well as the response is logically developed, the points clearly made and the sentence structure, grammar and spelling are of the standards expected of a quality response.