

CARIBBEAN EXAMINATIONS COUNCIL

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

JANUARY 2014

**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 five to eight short answers. Twenty marks are allocated for each question for a total of 60 marks.

Paper 02 consists of 12 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 must 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 six questions. The two novels (Questions 7–10) are Type A questions. The short story consists of Type B questions. Candidates must answer one question. Each question in Paper 02 is worth 35 marks for a total of 105.

Of the 12 questions on this paper, five had candidates earning full marks. Prose (Question 11) achieved the highest mean (22.41); the second highest mean was from Drama (Question 2 with a mean of 19.69). The lowest mean came from Prose (Question 8) with a mean of 7.92 out of a total of 35 marks for each question.

DETAILED COMMENTS

Paper 01 – Short Answer

Paper 01 assesses the following skills:

- Comprehension
- 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.

Compared with 2013, candidates’ performance on Paper 01 showed improvement in the Poetry and Prose Fiction profiles. Overall, the mean performance in Profile 1, Drama, was 9.69; in Profile 2, Poetry, 10.73; and Profile 3, Prose Fiction, 8.03. The weakest performance was in Prose Fiction.

Question 1 (Drama)

This question had the lowest mean. For Part (a), many candidates misinterpreted *aspects* and gave responses which merely stated the familial relationship between the two men (uncle/nephew). Acceptable responses should (keeping to lines 1–10) focus on the character traits of the men, for example, Petu was authoritative and authoritarian whereas Ato, the nephew being submissive, deferred readily to Petu’s commands. Part (b) asked for two functions served by the stage directions starting from line 10 and ending at line 20. Some candidates restated the stage directions whereas others responded appropriately to include the following: *they serve to inform the audience that time has elapsed*; *that Ato wastes no time in obeying Petu*; *that time has elapsed since Ato’s appearance and disappearance*; and *that Eulalie’s smoking and drinking reflect her attitude to the community’s traditions*.

Again the word *aspects* in Part (c) appeared to be problematic to candidates. Instead of focusing on the nature of the relationship between the couple, candidates provided ‘surface’ responses that essentially restated factual information from the extract, such as, Ato and Eulalie were married.

Some candidates did not provide sufficient justification for the aspects of the relationship identified, whereas some identified aspects with no justification. Acceptable responses should take into account the fact that *the couple is still very much in love with each other (they still can share a joke and they have private names for each other)*. Also, *Ato is protective of her (advising her not to drink too much)*.

In response to Part (d), although candidates understood what the question demanded, some responses were not as comprehensive and comments were mainly made about Eulalie's drinking and smoking. Responses should also include her disgust and resistance to the traditions of her husband's family.

Candidates were comfortable with Part (e) which dealt with tension and gave acceptable responses such as *the tension intensifies towards the end because the playwright increased the tempo of the action by the shortened lines of dialogue, increased use of stage directions and the use of questions*.

Part (f) allowed candidates to demonstrate their creativity in suggesting the title and justifying it. A few however, presented titles without textual evidence, and thus lost marks. Others 'lifted' words from the extract such as "taboo", "Ato" and "Eulalie" without critical application. Candidates need to remember that reader-response items are always text-based.

Question 2 (Poetry)

Most candidates earned full marks for Part (a) which asked for three things about the bayou (a place of mystery, habitat for frogs and grasshoppers, mossy).

Apart from mentioning the mystery, many candidates could not show how stanza 1 was connected to stanza 2. Acceptable responses for Part (b) should include the following: *stanza 1 introduces the idea of the allure of buried or sunken pirate treasure, while stanza 2 seems to take the reader on a treasure-hunting expedition where travellers seem to enter a world "dripping in mystery"; stanza 2 further develops the mystery introduced in stanza 1 by suggesting that beyond buried treasure, there might be even some live, dangerous creatures lurking beneath the surface*.

Although candidates were able to identify the device in stanza 2 that Part (c) required them to provide, many failed at explaining the effectiveness. Acceptable responses of the device included, *personification/metaphor ("the bayou sweats")*; *metaphor/imagery ("dripping in mystery")*; and *imagery appealing to sight ("murky") and sound ("hushed in secrecy")*. All devices point to the idea of a heightening of the tension/excitement surrounding the bayou's hidden and perhaps dangerous secrets.

For Part (d), candidates gave vague responses and the word *impressions* appeared to have been a challenge. Acceptable responses should indicate that *the impression is created that mortal danger lurks in the bayou and this can come from any of the creatures/monsters which can grip, clench, snap and hold.*

Most candidates gave reasonable responses to Part (e) and mentioned the use of phrases like, *holds a mystery, movements unknown, dripping in mystery* to suggest the notion that the person is viewing the bayou from a distance. For Part (f), candidates tended to view stanza 4 in isolation and therefore missed how it is connected to the poem as a whole. Acceptable responses should mention how it *reinforces the idea of mystery and danger to those who venture in it; “guardian trees” which suggest that the vegetation serves to protect its secrets from intruders; the image of the empty canoe drifting suggests that the human occupant(s) has/have been destroyed by the bayou or the creatures there — a general reinforcement of danger throughout the poem.*

Some candidates did not exercise creativity in Part (g). However, others gave acceptable responses in describing and substantiating the mystery—*there is a monster in the water; there is no danger but a feeling of dread created by the atmosphere and vegetation.*

Question 3 (Prose)

Candidates performed satisfactorily on Part (a) which asked for two reasons for Amabelle’s visit to Kongo (*to ask his approval for the elder to visit him to talk about Joel’s accident and to make an offer to pay for Joel’s funeral*). However, many failed to be specific in their responses, providing vague or incorrect assumptions as their answers. For instance, many stated that Amabelle visited Kongo because she wanted to ask him something or she sought to tell him that the elder wanted to see him, suggesting then that Kongo was being summoned by the elder, rather than the elder wishing to visit him.

For Part (b), candidates were also able to provide the two versions of Joel’s death as presented in the extract — *accident* and *homicide*. Many scored full marks on this item. For Part (c), some candidates were able to accurately identify Kongo’s feelings (*grief/sorrow*) and that *his over-emphasized actions disguised his emotions* (for example, *digging flour from his fingernails and taking snuff to steady himself*).

For Part (d), candidates were able, for the most part, to identify the simile and a few gave reasonable responses about its effectiveness. However, many candidates merely explained what weeds are/do. Those who responded appropriately, mentioned *Joel being one with nature or his being independent/self-reliant, bringing out the notion that weeds need very little, if any, special treatment to flourish*. Candidates found Part (e) quite challenging. Generally they could not explain what was ironical in the way Joel was buried. Many commented on the fact that he was

buried naked. Candidates could not make the link between the father giving Joel a ceremonial burial and a typical ceremonial burial. Ideally, candidates were expected to note that *all the trappings of a 'decent' burial were removed yet his father's description of the burial ritual made Joel into a kind of cosmic royalty.*

Some candidates knew what was required for Part (f) but lacked the literary language to express themselves. Essentially, *Kongo's measured, controlled, simple and affectionate choice of words/expressions seem extraordinary, heroic and regal. His tendency to repeat reinforces his sense of loss but also (especially when he repeats "my son") shows grief, pride and affection.* Part (g) asked to state what was suggested in line 26 ("Tell him I am a man....He was a man, too, my son."). Many candidates only captured the fact that his refusal of financial aid for the burial of his son suggests he is independent and missed the opportunity to suggest that Kongo believes that he needs to be treated with respect regardless of his position.

Recommendations

- Teachers/instructors should continue to provide opportunities for students to be exposed to literature.
- Discussing the effectiveness of literary devices must be the focus of continued analysis of style. It is not good enough to merely identify or define devices.
- 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.
- Candidates are encouraged to watch live and recorded plays so that they are better able to appreciate the 'performance' element of the genre. They need to focus some more on the dramatic function of stage directions.
- Teachers could help students to dramatize sections of plays in class, dramatize scenes and summarize them to encourage recall.
- Teachers are encouraged to assist students in understanding the rubric of examinations so that they do only what is asked.

Paper 02 – Essay Questions

The following are the skills and aptitudes tested in Paper 02 (as outlined on page 23 of the syllabus):

- 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
- 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)
- The ability to communicate informed opinions and judgments in well-structured, analytical responses ...and written form using the vocabulary of literary criticism
- The ability to produce balanced critical analyses
- 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 02
- The ability to recognize and distinguish between moral assumptions contained in a particular text
- A grasp of concepts and values and an understanding of how these are manifested in literature

Drama – *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

Question 1

For Question 1, candidates were asked to describe the challenges faced by one of these couples: Lysander and Hermia or Demetrius and Helena before their wedding. Part (b) asked for a description of how the challenges identified in Part (a) are resolved and Part (c), Shakespeare's use of the couples' experience to demonstrate that marriage is an important social institution. Although some candidates resorted to narration of the couples' stories, many identified appropriate challenges, for instance, *Egeus' objections to Lysander and his insistence that*

Hermia marry Demetrius; under the enchantment Lysander professes love to Helena and rejects Hermia; Egeus supporting the idea that Demetrius should be Helena's husband or generally, society's patriarchal laws and their impact on these couples.

Part (b) was also reasonably attempted. Part (c) however, posed a challenge as many candidates were not able to make the link that Shakespeare's dramatic presentation of marriage forms part of the climax. This part of the question asked candidates to show how Shakespeare uses the couples' experience to demonstrate that marriage is an important social institution. This implicit use of technique (via the marriages) is a typical feature of comedies and candidates missed this. Generally, candidates tended to speak more about love than marriage, missing the point that the marriages offer resolution and consolidation, thus endorsing the notion that it is worthwhile and desirable.

The mean for this question was 17.94.

Question 2

Candidates handled this question better than Question 1. Part (a) asked for a description of one of the incidents which occurs in the magic wood and Part (b), a discussion of the outcome of this incident. Part (c) asked for an examination of how this incident relates to the title of the play. Although few candidates narrated, most confined their discussion to the woods. For Part (a), acceptable responses included the consequences of Oberon's malice and Puck's enchantment.

Part (b) was not handled well as some candidates could not separate the incident from the outcome and in cases where the outcome was mentioned, it was not discussed. Acceptable responses included *the ways in which Puck 're-enchants' the enchanted ones back to the right ways of seeing* or *the ways in which the illusion is removed so characters are back to normal*. Relating the incident to the title (as was asked for in Part (c)) was handled fairly well. Even responses that were weak in Parts (a) and (b), scored well here as candidates were able to explore issues such as magic, dream, the fantastical and the suspension of reality.

The mean for this question was 19.69.

Recommendations

A few recommendations that will enable candidates to better appreciate Shakespearean texts (and drama as a whole) are given below.

- Teachers should find creative ways to get students to summarize scenes (even the minor scenes).

- Students should be encouraged to dramatize scenes to aid recall.
- Teachers should ask students to identify dramatic techniques in live dramatizations.
- More practice is needed with regard to the Part (c) of drama questions, which tend to target the language and application of drama.
- Teachers should use technology (such as DVDs) to demonstrate how dramatic techniques work.
- Teachers should prepare worksheets with questions/tasks that focus on dramatic techniques.

Old Story Time

Question 3

The thematic concern of this question was family relationships. Part (a) asked for Lois' role in the play; Part (b), a discussion of one instance of conflict involving Lois and Part (c), an examination of two ways in which Rhone resolves conflict in the play. Candidates tended to discuss the play rather than concentrate on Lois' role. Inaccuracies such as Lois being male, her being confused with the character Miss Aggy (Mama) and misrepresenting other texts were noted. Acceptable responses for Part (a) dealt with *Lois' pivotal role as wife, daughter, daughter-in-law and professional* and *the ways in which she is connected to Len, Miss Aggy and George*. In terms of conflict, as required in Part (b), candidates were expected to choose one instance in the play where this was evident. Candidates did better in this part as they were able to identify and discuss instances such as *when Miss Aggy sees her photograph and the consequences*; any other physical encounter (as in her mother-in-law's visits); *the blackmailing incident with George* or even when *she accuses Len of being cold and insensitive*.

For Part (c), many candidates described instead of examined the two ways in which the conflict was resolved. Some concentrated on one conflict instead of two. Acceptable responses included *dramatic irony, contrast, symbolism* (as in the ending of the play) and *the use of Pa Ben as character/storyteller in his role as mediator*. Others concentrated on the ways in which the characters solved their own conflict and not the ways in which the playwright did, which essentially evaded the playwright's craft.

The mean for this question was 16.78.

Question 4

This question earned the lowest mean for the drama section. Candidates were expected to describe one instance when the audience was reminded that the play has its roots in the past (Part (a)). Acceptable responses for this aspect included *the rural setting for the storytelling; references to 60 years ago; the type of housing (wattle and daub); the king's head on stamps and monetary currency*. Part (b) asked for a discussion of one way in which flashbacks are used to reinforce the idea of past events. Candidates were expected to mention for instance, *Lois as the bank teller and being blackmailed by her boss George; Len's humiliation at school at the hands of George and his peers*. Candidates fared better in Part (c) which asked for a discussion of one theme highlighted by the playwright's treatment of the past. Submissions such as *family relationships, cultural practice, gender, power relationships, colour and class* were acceptable.

The mean for this question was 15.67.

Poetry

Question 5

The two named poems for this question were "Dulce et Decorum Est" and "This is the Dark Time, My Love". Part (a) required candidates to describe the suffering presented in each poem. They were better able to describe the suffering in "Dulce et Decorum Est", perhaps because of its overtly physical nature. Candidates did not always capture the emotional/mental suffering in the latter poem. For Part (b), candidates correctly identified and named the device used to portray the suffering but many could not sustain the discussion (that is, keeping it to the theme of human suffering). Part (c), which asked candidates to use the title of each poem to discuss the poem they found more effective in portraying human suffering, posed some challenges as well. Although this part of the question allowed for personal choice and discretion, candidates were expected to apply the content and craft to their personal responses.

The mean for this question was 13.39.

Question 6

This question required candidates to identify two poems by name, which focus on relationships. Although some candidates did not use poems in this cycle and others used inappropriate texts (as in non-poetry), many selected appropriate poems for this question. However, details to support the theme of relationships were not always sustained, for example, in "Orchids". A popular and well-handled poem was "God's Grandeur" which portrays mankind's relationship with the environment. A few lesser known poems were not handled confidently, for example, "South",

“Theme for English B” and “West Indies, USA”. Part (a) asked candidates to describe the relationship. Part (b) asked for a discussion of devices used to explore the relationship in each poem. The tendency was to explain and not analyse. Further, in some instances, only one device was identified. If this is to be acceptable, the candidates must show its effectiveness (textually) in both poems. In order to gain full marks, candidates must correctly identify each device, show how it is used to portray the relationship and make a statement of comparison between the two poems.

For Part (c), candidates were asked to discuss the relationship they found more appealing. Many did not refer to the other poem or suggest how they came to prefer the poem being discussed. Those who handled this section well concentrated on relationships involving man/nature; teacher/student; parent/child. For this section, application and poem selection posed challenges. Discussions were unbalanced because candidates did not always know both poems well enough for the application needed.

Prose Fiction

Prose Fiction consists of six questions. The questions set on the two novels (Questions 7–10) are Type A questions. The questions set on the short story consist of Type B questions. Candidates were required to answer one question from this section.

Songs of Silence

Question 7

This was not a popular choice among candidates. Responses were sparse and superficial. There were instances of inaccuracies and personal invention. Very few candidates were sufficiently aware of the text and its nuances. For Part (a), candidates were asked to discuss the relationship between these characters — Longman and Marlene’s mother and the Lady with no name and Marlene’s father. For Part (b), candidates were required to explain what limits the narrator from telling the whole story of these relationships. For Part (c), candidates were asked to show how the way the story is told contributes to the fascination. The relationships involving Marlene’s parents are clouded with uncertainties and candidates for Part (a) were expected to describe what appeared to be unusual about these relationships, for instance, *Marlene’s observation that when the traveller (Longman) stopped or stayed, her mother was exceptionally joyful and would break out into singing; the incident of Marlene seeing her father giving fish to the no name lady and his stern warning for her not to mention it and the ways in which she became suspicious and speculative.*

Acceptable responses to Part (b) included, the fact that *the narrator's mother outlines what issues belong to the world of adults and that of children; the role of village gossip, superstition and rumour; and generally, the limitations of a child narrator, using the first person point of view.*

Implicit in this part of the question is the writer's technique. A few candidates hinted at but did not discuss with conviction the elements of Part (c), which really should concentrate on how the story is told. Acceptable responses to this part of the question included: *using Marlene as the child narrator (in a sense, the eyes of a child); the loyal, trusting daughter speculating on the marital relationships of her parents; the ways in which the blanks are filled; the interaction of the adult or outside perspective on the issues and the role of irony and intrigue.*

The mean for this question was 10.54.

Question 8

This was an open-ended question in which candidates were to discuss the two ways of viewing the text — as a cohesive whole or as a collection of separate short stories. Acceptable responses for the whole text view would entail the fact that *Marlene is the single narrator throughout; the setting is typically the same rural village; Marlene's family members appear in the stories and that the symbols, and images of the river, silence and colours are seen in the text.* For the view of the short story, the idea that *the stories are self-sustaining; the themes changing; the main characters can 'stand alone'; separate chapter titles and the varying perspectives (from the communal to the intensely personal) are all points that may be used.*

The mean for this question was 7.92, the lowest for this paper.

The Wine of Astonishment

Question 9

This question focused on the roles played by the minor characters Primus and Buntin. Part (a) asked for a description of an incident in which either Primus or Buntin plays a meaningful role; Part (b) asked candidates to comment on this character's role in the novel and Part (c), for a discussion of the male villagers as a group in the novel. Although it appeared that the word *meaningful* posed a challenge, generally, Primus was the more popular choice for Part (a). Many cited the Bolo/Primus standoff and the few who chose Buntin, mentioned his shop being the meeting place for the community. Those who chose Buntin often did not recognize that for Part (b), he was also part of the awakening of the consciousness of the community and black people generally. Although candidates mentioned the activities at his shop, they did not take the

discussion much further. For Part (c), candidates tended to describe what the men did but did not so much see how they functioned as a group in terms of their being protectors, guardians of the traditions (for example, stick fighting), restorers of order and providers.

The mean for this question was 19.69.

Question 10

This open-ended question asked candidates to look at both sides of Bolo. It was the preferred choice although some candidates resorted to storytelling or discussed only one side of Bolo. Superior candidates showed both sides of the argument — Bolo the warrior and community-builder and Bolo the ‘bad john’ who degenerates when the community lacked the courage to support his values.

The mean for this question was 15.97.

Short Stories

A World of Prose

Question 11

“Berry” and “The Boy Who Loved Ice Cream” were used to discuss the issue of injustice. Part (a) asked for an outline of each story; Part (b), a description of the injustice in each story and Part (c), a discussion of the narrator the candidate thinks contributes more to his/her understanding of injustice. Candidates knew the stories and managed Part (a) quite well. The issue of injustice resonated with them and they had strong views about racism, parent/child relationships and matters of infidelity. These enabled them to form their own views. What a few lacked for Part (c) was showing how their own experiences are shaped by the characters’ experience of injustice. Additionally, some candidates did not mention the impact of writer’s craft, as in the omniscient narrator’s perspective as a means of getting into the hearts and minds of the characters.

The mean for this question was 22.41, the highest overall.

Question 12

Candidates were asked to refer to two stories studied from their prescribed text and, for Part (a), to describe a memorable event or incident in the stories; for Part (b), to comment on one character’s reaction to the events or incidents in the stories and for Part (c), to show how the writer keeps the reader interested in the stories. Common choices were “Emma”, “Blackout”,

“Shabine” and “The Boy Who Loved Ice Cream”. Part (b) proved to be the most challenging as candidates tended to narrate before getting to the essential material required for the response. Some candidates recognized writer’s craft that was necessary to do justice to Part (c) and mentioned the child narrator and the use of flashback.

The mean for this question was 16.71.

Recommendations

- Candidates need to be conscious of the demands of the comparative essay, as in Paper 02, Questions 5 and 6 (Poetry) and Questions 11–12 (Prose Fiction, Short Stories).
- A genre-specific approach is suggested so that candidates can better appreciate the discrete nature of the genres and not use them inappropriately in their responses.
- Teachers must continue to teach drama from a technical perspective and not as prose. The teaching and reinforcing of dramatic techniques must remain important.
- Modelling responses and more sustained practice are needed for students to sharpen their essay-writing skills. Modelling is essential. Attention must be paid to all parts of the question.
- The use of technology is suggested to enhance and reinforce learning and appreciation of texts, for example, websites to enrich the learning experience.
- Special attention should be paid to the section of the questions addressing the devices and effectiveness as candidates continue to underperform in this area.

Candidates are reminded that January 2015 will be the end of this cycle and hence this cycle of texts. A new cycle of texts will be used for June 2015.

For the Prose section in Paper 02, the only comparative questions are those set on the Short Stories (Questions 11 and 12). All other prose questions are on single texts. Candidates need to select the appropriate texts from the revised syllabus in order to be adequately prepared for the examinations.