

GCSE

Examiners' report

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

J351

For first teaching in 2015

J351/02 November 2023 series

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Introduction

Our examiners' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the examinations. They provide useful guidance for future candidates.

The reports will include a general commentary on candidates' performance, identify technical aspects examined in the questions and highlight good performance and where performance could be improved. A selection of candidate answers is also provided. The reports will also explain aspects which caused difficulty and why the difficulties arose, whether through a lack of knowledge, poor examination technique, or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

Where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report.

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Paper 2 series overview

General introduction

The J351/02 GCSE (9 – 1) English Language Exploring effects and impacts component assesses candidates' ability to:

- read and respond to 20th century fiction texts and
- write imaginatively and creatively.

Candidates should answer the questions in the order that they are given, as each question is designed to prepare students for the next question. This includes responding to the writing, as the topics of both writing tasks draw on themes and ideas explored in the reading section, as well as encourage candidates to demonstrate structure and language techniques and devices that they will have engaged with in the reading section.

The short answer questions in Question 1 require focus on an early section of Text 1. Questions 2 and 3 draw candidates' attention to how the writers use language and structure to achieve effects. A short section of Text 1 is used for Question 2 and a longer section of Text 2 is used for Question 3. Question 4 uses both texts and requires the candidates to respond to a question in which they will demonstrate their ability to compare the writers' ideas and perspectives and how they are conveyed, as well as evaluate the texts in light of a statement that could be applied to both of them. Candidates are encouraged to recast appropriate material from their responses to earlier questions in their Question 4 answers.

In the Writing Section (Questions 5 and 6), candidates are asked to choose just one of the two writing tasks. They will demonstrate their ability to write creatively and imaginatively in response to one of those tasks.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
<p>In Section A: Reading</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • read the texts carefully and thoughtfully • read the questions carefully • integrated short and relevant quotations • used appropriate subject terminology in Questions 2 and 3 • analysed the effects of language and structure in Questions 2 and 3 • compared writers' methods as well as content in Question 4 • considered an evaluative approach to the statement given in Question 4. <p>In Section B: Writing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • planned and structured their writing response carefully for effect: there was a clear shape with a discernible beginning, middle and end • made effective use of sentence structures, punctuation and vocabulary. 	<p>In Section A: Reading</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • did not read the texts properly • misread the questions • focused on content rather than language and structure in Questions 2 and 3 • did not use subject terminology or used wrong subject terminology in Questions 2 and 3 • made generic comments about the use of such devices as alliteration or complex sentences • made no comparisons or limited comparisons to merely ideas and content in Question 4. <p>In Section B: Writing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • did not plan their writing response • did not finish their writing response • made multiple errors in sentence structures and spelling • made tense changes inappropriately.

Section A overview

J351 02 Exploring effects and impacts uses two unseen literary prose texts, one of which may be literary non-fiction. Both texts were published in the 20th or 21st century and they are linked thematically. As this qualification is not tiered, either or both texts may be slightly edited to make sure that they are accessible for all candidates and challenging enough for the most able.

Text 1, adapted from *The Cruel Sea* by Nicholas Monserrat, published in 1951 but set at the outset of World War 2, describes the experiences of a young and inexperienced Sub-Lieutenant (Ferraby) who is left in charge of his ship, while the Captain (Ericson) catches up on some much needed sleep. Text 2, adapted from *Where the Crawdads Sing* by Delia Owens, published in 2018 but set in North Carolina in the 1950s, describes 7-year-old Kya's experience when she secretly takes the family fishing boat out on an adventure on her own.

Most candidates engaged well with the texts and appeared to relate successfully to the experiences of the two young people and their thoughts and feelings about being in sole control of a vessel for the first time.

OCR support



A delivery guide for teaching how to read unseen 20th and 21st century literary texts may be found [here](#) on Teach Cambridge.

Section A Question 1

Question 1 assesses AO1: candidates' ability to select and interpret information. Question 1 uses a very short section (in this case the first 7 lines) from early on in Text 1. It is designed to provide an accessible start to the examination by helping candidates to read closely a small section of one of their texts. All candidates should be able to achieve some marks in this section.

Question 1 (a)

Question 1 is about **Text 1**, *The Cruel Sea* by Nicholas Monserrat.

1 Look at lines 1–7.

(a) Give **two** phrases from these lines that show what Ferraby did for the first two hours of the morning watch.

1

2

[2]

Most candidates could select any two of the following to show what Ferraby did for the first two hours of the morning watch: '(leaving Ferraby to) **watch him** (Ericson)'; '(or) **stare at the horizon**'; '(and occasionally to) **check a buoy**'; '**check (...)** a lighthouse (on the chart)'.

Just occasionally candidates offered an answer that wasn't a quotation or came from outside the prescribed lines. Sometimes they offered too much material, so that, while their response included a correct phrase, or correct phrases, the response could not be considered to meet the AO1 requirement 'to select'. A few candidates mixed up the characters in both this question and 1(b).

Question 1 (b)

(b) Explain **two** reasons why Captain Ericson decided to leave Sub-Lieutenant Ferraby in charge.

1

.....

2

.....

[2]

Again, most candidates could find two reasons why Ericson decided to leave Ferraby in charge. Any two explanations derived from the following were acceptable: '**they were set on a straight, trouble-free course**'; '**he'd had enough**'; '**He'd been on the bridge from dusk until midnight**'; '**he badly needed sleep**'.

Occasionally candidates offered reasons that were outside the text, for example 'Ericson decided to leave Ferraby because he wanted to give Ferraby a chance to prove what he could do.' There is nothing in the first seven lines of the text that points to this being a reason.

Some picked out how the language used to describe the 'lookouts' – 'dark, motionless' – made these people seem insignificant and unimportant compared to Ferraby. Meanwhile others picked out how the use of formal or official language relating to Ferraby's rank conveys his sense of pride at what he perceives to be his important position. A response that included all these points (which is by no means an exhaustive list of the points that could be made) would attract full marks.

Good use of subject terminology was seen, but some weaker responses did not get much beyond identification of language and structure devices. Alternatively, they listed quotations that were apparently evidence that Ferraby was 'enjoying' himself, but there was no explanation offered.

OCR support



A teaching guide about writing about language and structure can be found [here](#) on Teach Cambridge.

Exemplar 1

5 marks (Level 5)

Structurally, the single-sentence paragraph "Presently he began to enjoy himself" shows a turning point in Ferraby's enjoyment of the moment. While ~~both~~ explicit is the enjoyment, shown by the word "enjoy", there is also a ~~subtle~~ subtle shift in pace created by isolating his ~~enjoy~~ realisation of enjoyment on a single line, which ~~shows~~ implies that it is a significant change. The isolation of an explicit realisation of Ferraby's enjoyment is isolated on a single line to ~~enjoy~~ show how much he is enjoying the moment.

Writing about structure: Question 2

Quite often candidates struggle to write about short sentences and single-sentence paragraphs in a meaningful way. They can usually identify them as such, but then go on to make rather generic comments. In Exemplar 1, the candidate has commented meaningfully on how the use of the short-sentence in a one-sentence paragraph 'shows a turning point in Ferraby's enjoyment ...there is also a subtle shift in pace created by isolating his realisation of enjoyment on a single line, which implies that it is a significant change.' This demonstrates perceptive understanding of what the writer is hoping to achieve here.

Question 3

Question 3 is about **Text 2**, *Where the Crawdads Sing* by Delia Owens.

3 Look at lines 15–29.

Explore how the writer uses language and structure to describe how Kya feels challenged by this experience.

Support your ideas by using relevant subject terminology.

[12]

Question 3 assesses the same AO2 skills as Question 2 but uses a lengthier section of Text 2 and gives candidates rather more to think about. One of the first things to think about here was how we define 'challenge' in relation to Kya's experiences. Some things are straightforward for her: she is clearly very adept at poling the boat and she has some knowledge of the waterways, flora and fauna she encounters and navigates.

However, challenge arises in other aspects of her situation: she is on her own ('without Jodie'); she knows one 'channel' will take her to the estuary that she wants to reach, but she doesn't know which one, and has to find it through trial and error. She also knows she has to be mentally alert ('keeping all these landmarks straight in her mind so she could get back') so she doesn't get lost. She also faces the challenge of watching time, so she won't run aground when the channels 'shallow up'. Her biggest challenge is the one posed by the ocean and its immense power, and she backs off in the face of this challenge, everything else becoming inconsequential. There is also the potential challenge suggested in the weather on her return ('Thunderheads grew in the western sky ...').

It was also appropriate to consider Kya's feelings of guilt as a possible challenge and how this guilt impacted her perception of the environment as hostile - because she knows she did a wrong thing in taking the boat out.

Successful candidates analysed how language and structure helped Owens to convey Kya's feelings of being challenged. In structure, some candidates considered the short action-filled paragraphs, suggesting the variety of challenges and experiences Kya has – lagoons – trees – dead ends – estuary – creek – tall grass – ocean – surf – thunder. Others considered the use of repetition of references to the need to return home ('had to backtrack...so she could get back... She'd have to head back... Time to turn around') – suggesting how it is constantly on her mind that she shouldn't be out here. Many picked up on the tricolon of 'gray, stern and pulsing' to comment on how this emphasises the ocean's hostility. In language, they often picked up the metaphor 'throat of oaks' which could swallow her, and the personification of the surf that 'taunted her, daring her...'. mocking her, or perhaps reflecting Kya's own wish that she was brave enough to go into the sea.

As with Question 2, appropriate use of subject terminology was seen, but some weaker responses did not get much beyond identification of language and structure devices. Alternatively, they listed quotations that were apparently evidence that Kya was 'challenged', but there was no explanation offered.

Question 4

Question 4 is about **Text 1**, *The Cruel Sea*, and **Text 2**, *Where the Crawdads Sing*.

4 'Both texts powerfully present young people taking control.'

How far do you agree with this statement?

In your answer you should:

- discuss the young people's experience of taking control
- explain how far the young people succeed in taking control
- compare the ways the writers present young people taking control.

Support your response with quotations from **Text 1** and **Text 2**.

[18]

Question 4 assesses:

AO3: comparing writers' ideas and perspectives, as well as how these are conveyed, across two or more texts and

AO4: evaluating texts critically and supporting this with appropriate textual references.

The first three questions on this examination prepare candidates for Question 4, which is worth the same number of marks as Questions 2 and 3 put together. For this reason, candidates should stop at this point and think carefully about how they will frame their response before they start writing. They might also consider any relevant material they have written in their responses to Questions 1, 2 and 3 how it may be recast appropriately to address the question here.

In this examination series, Question 4 asked candidates to consider how far both texts powerfully presented young people taking control. Most candidates recognised that in Text 1 the young person (a 20-year-old man) was left in supervision of a huge ship while his Captain caught up on sleep, whereas in Text 2 the young person (a 7-year-old child) took it upon herself to take sole control of her family's fishing boat. Many candidates also observed that Ferraby's position of control was foisted upon him and in the beginning he felt ill-equipped and frightened whereas Kya chose to take her family's boat and initially felt confident and adventurous. Both characters experienced a change in perspective towards their position in the course of their experience.

It was pleasing to see many candidates looking for ways both to agree with and challenge the statement.

It was also clear that centres are preparing candidates well for AO4. As ever, the expectation of 'powerfully' here challenged the top candidates to consider the writers' craft. Middle range candidates tended to focus more on the experiences of the young people or the reader's reactions to their experiences ('Ferraby felt proud'; 'Kya felt frightened' etc) rather than the effectiveness of the actual writing. Weaker responses tended to open by agreeing with the statement then offer some evidence to illustrate it.

The comparative element to this task (AO3) was quite often less successful, either because candidates did not really link their comparisons to the actual statement or because they were rather simple (for example, 'Ferraby is a grown up while Kya is a child'). Sometimes comparisons were left implicit: an example of this would be where candidates offered alternating paragraphs of commentary on each text without making it clear how they were connected.

Exemplar 2

14 marks (4 + 10)

I agree to an extent that both texts powerfully present young people taking control, as Text 1's depictions of Ferraby taking control are less powerful, and he is less successful as he has less control than he thinks, especially compared to Text 2.

Planning and preparing: Question 4

As Question 4 is a high tariff question, it really does pay to take a few minutes to prepare by looking at the given statement with a view to deciding in what ways it can be applied to each text and in what ways it can be challenged. It is clear in Exemplar 2, which is an introduction to Question 4, that the candidate has done this and gives us an opening indication of the directions their response will take and the ideas which they will explore. This candidate went on to offer an organised response which was straightforward for an examiner to follow.

Misconception

Candidates quite often struggled to draw meaningful comparisons in their writing. The bulleted prompts that form part of Question 4 are helpful here. More focus on the third bullet ('Compare the ways the writers present young people taking control') could have helped some candidates score higher than Level 2 for AO3. This is because at Level 3 (and above) candidates are expected to move beyond looking at comparisons of just content and should begin to consider **how** ideas and perspectives are conveyed.

OCR support

A teaching guide about comparing and evaluating texts can be found [here](#) on Teach Cambridge.

Section B overview

Questions 5 and 6 assess:

AO5: Communicate clearly, effectively and imaginatively, selecting and adapting tone, style and register for different forms, purposes and audiences.

Organise information and ideas, using structural and grammatical features to support coherence and cohesion of texts.

AO6: Use a range of vocabulary and sentence structures for clarity, purpose and effect, with accurate spelling and punctuation.

Candidates are offered a choice of writing tasks. They choose either Question 5 or Question 6.

The writing tasks are designed to build on what candidates have read in Section A of the examination. It is unwise to advise candidates to do the writing task first because candidates may be able to use what they have read to inspire the content and style of their writing.

Many candidates understood that the purpose of their writing was to engage and entertain and they often went to great lengths to this end. The quality of some writing in response to both questions was sometimes astonishing given the time constraints of the examination. It is clear that centres have devoted much time and effort to helping candidates hone their creative skills and the work here has clearly paid off.

Mostly candidates wrote in coherent sentences and they were often ambitious (if not always precise) in their vocabulary choices. However, a number of candidates are not using accurate punctuation either within or between sentences. The last few examination sessions have seen increasing problems in maintaining the same tense in writing too.

OCR support



A teaching guide about spelling, punctuation and grammar can be found [here](#) on Teach Cambridge.

Question 5*

5* *The Challenge.*

Use this as the title for a story.

In your writing you should:

- choose a clear viewpoint
- describe the setting
- explore how your character feels about the experience.

[40]

As to be expected, there were many 'challenges' of a physical nature offered here – sports games, races, mountain expeditions. These were often original and engaging to read. Candidates should however be discouraged from writing a response that reads like the register of an oral football game commentary: it was often difficult to find much merit in a succession of clichéd phrases that followed a rather predictable shape.

There were good attempts at writing about the 'challenges' to be found in certain video games as well as personal and life challenges. As ever, the candidates who found interesting and unusual ways of interpreting 'The Challenge' could gain themselves a bit of a head start with examiners who were rightly impressed by their ingenuity and originality.

Exemplar 3

40 marks (24 + 16)

The Challenge

One foot in front of the other. One foot, then the next, then the next. A line of imprints stretched out behind the traveller in a winding trail. The sand in his boots hissed with a shifting seafoam sound as he trudged forward over the endless dunes.

Squinting through the Kas heat-haze over his fraying ~~sand~~ sandmask, the traveller glimpsed a cluster of huts on the horizon. He surged forward. His feet kicked up fine puffs of sand as he ran. He scrambled up the side of a dune, his feet slipping underneath him as he clawed his way up, peering over the crest to feast his eyes on...

Rocks.

Not huts, but great, beige, crumbling lumps of clay and sand that shed a fine layer of dust as the traveller brushed past them. He stood

Writing for effects and impacts: Question 5

These are the opening paragraphs of a top candidate's response to Question 5. Immediately we can see how the candidate deliberately positions the reader (AO5 Level 6) with some effective 'hooking'. Short sentences and repeated structures shape meaning and create impact (AO6 Level 4). Images and vocabulary ('the sand in his boots hissed with a shifting seafoam sound', 'trudged', 'endless dunes', 'squinting through the heat-haze', 'glimpsed', 'cluster of huts on the horizon', 'surged', 'kicked up fine puffs of sand as he ran', 'scrambled', 'lurching') are precise and subtle (AO6 Level 4). We have a beautifully managed anti-climax in the one-word paragraph 'rocks', followed by the extended description ('great, beige, crumbling lumps of clay') that effectively conveys the character's extreme disappointment.

The response continued to demonstrate similar achievement and received full marks overall.

Question 6*

6* Write a description of a place where you had an adventure.

In your writing you should describe:

- what was memorable about the place and adventure
- how the adventure affected your thoughts and feelings
- the way you feel about that place now.

[40]

Some responses put more focus on the 'adventure' than the 'place'. This did not necessarily matter, though responses that were able to convey how the atmosphere or setting of a place contributed to the adventure were often the most successful.

There were many descriptions of holiday locations, spooky residences and childhood haunts. Video game experiences made an appearance here too. The question could appear to invite an autobiographical account, but candidates are perfectly free to write about an imagined experience in Question 6, if they wish.

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