

Commentary on candidate evidence

Candidate 3

The evidence for this candidate has achieved the following marks for each section of this course assessment component. The candidate was awarded **12 marks**.

Genre: Creative – poetry

Title: The Boy Soldier

The poem's title is very apt: it immediately evokes childhood innocence playing at war. There are three stanzas, each representing the Air Force, the Navy and the Army respectively. In stanza one, the boy is watching an aerial battle overhead, while looking for metal parts (of planes) on the ground. In the second stanza, he plays with paper boats in a puddle, pretending to be the commander. The final stanza describes him shooting marbles at rats.

Content

The treatment of the central thematic concern, ie a boy playing war and the juxtaposition of innocence vs. brutality and death, reveals thoughtfulness and imagination throughout. The poem uses contrast of themes and ideas (the ordinary vs. the extraordinary eg "wellies" vs. gods, "Poseidon", "Orion", or the lethal dogfights above the boy vs. his dream-like search for "Icarus' remnants"), which reinforces this content. The allusions to Orion and Poseidon jar slightly, as though they are put in as an addition.

Structure

The shaping and structuring of the poem is consistent and contributes to its impact. The form presented here, three stanzas reflecting three different forms of 20th century warfare, shapes the poem despite the free form; some lines have a discernible metre, eg "he lifts his face to soaring dog fights", and it could be argued that the initial dactyl in "spiralling in the sky" reflects the plane's manoeuvres. There is no rhyme scheme. Each stanza ends with an unequivocal reference to death, "fatal flight", "Poseidon's watery embrace", "Orion's wrath".

Tone/mood

The mood which is created and generally sustained reveals a distinctive authorial voice. The authorial voice here incorporates the child's vision, which heightens the idea of this contrast (st.1: "turned hunter he seeks out metal treasure", st.2 "he commands the fleet"). The actions are for the most part described from the boy's point of view; someone watching him would see a boy playing in a puddle. The poem captures the boy's longing in "he lifts his face" to the fighter planes, while remaining "Earth bound", playing in "stagnant craters". The craters are perhaps additionally ambiguous, either a mere puddle, or indeed a crater left after a bomb attack. The second seems more likely since it would tie in with the

fact that there are “metal treasures” to be found. The reference to Icarus enhances the melancholic tone – the boy who wanted to be near the sun. The poem’s atmosphere is redolent of the era without being clumsy: the allusion to Owen in st. 1 “wellie-shod”, “dog fights”, the “red-bricked trenches” in st. 3, as well as the fact that the boy plays with paper boats and marbles all hint at 20th century warfare. (It is possible that the poem’s title also alludes to child soldiers, thereby extending its scope into something more universal.)

Expression

The candidate displays a confident use of style, technique and language with a degree of originality. Contrast is used throughout, and in many different forms, “Soft-skinned” vs. “metal treasure”; “Earth bound” vs. “flight”, “paper-folded hulls” etc. The candidate uses sibilance throughout “Soft skinned ... lifts his face to soaring dog fights spiraling in the sky” “silent sailors” “sending them scattering ... sanctuary” which could also be seen as ambiguous: on the one hand representing the sound of whispers and silence, and therefore death - and on the other hand evoking sounds of war, specifically the whistle of dropping bombs.

Overall, the poem meets all of the criteria in the range 12-10 fully, and is therefore awarded the highest mark in that category.

Mark: 12