

# LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

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Paper 0486/12  
Poetry and Prose

## Key Messages

For success in this component, candidates need to be able to:

- demonstrate a detailed knowledge and understanding of the texts they have studied
- read the questions carefully and identify precisely what they are being asked to do
- organise their response into a logical and well-structured argument
- offer detailed textual support for the points they are making
- demonstrate an understanding of how writers achieve their effects.

## General Comments

This was the first session of the new examination in which poetry and prose are examined separately from drama. Candidates were generally well prepared for the change, and no rubric infringements were noted arising from the new arrangement. Most candidates allocated their time sensibly, and there were few scripts where rushed final answers were in evidence.

Evidence of planning of answers was to be found on many scripts. Although there is no requirement for candidates to provide a plan on their answer booklet, many find it helpful to do so. The evidence suggests that where candidates do plan in this way, about half a page of notes organised into some structured form can help to produce organised answers. More elaborate plans and first drafts, however, tend to be counter-productive by significantly reducing the time available for the actual response to be written.

Candidates seemed to find the provision of the texts of poems on the question paper helpful, and were able to use quotation more confidently and purposefully. In the prose section of the paper, extract questions were markedly more popular than the discursive alternatives for most texts.

In general, stronger answers clearly identified the key terms of the question and organised their material logically, using appropriate textual support and commenting on the ways the writer used language to create effects. Some went beyond that to produce a personal critical evaluation which showed a perceptive understanding of the text, and awareness of the subtler implications of both text and question. Scripts at all levels of achievement contained evidence of personal engagement with and enjoyment of the texts studied. Candidates often displayed considerable background knowledge about authors, texts and contexts. When relevant to the question, this material can enhance the quality of a response. Some candidates offered an introductory paragraph or two offering biographical background to the writer, or generalisations about the context in which the writer was working or the work was produced, often derived from secondary sources. Such material is of more limited value and needs to be used sparingly if at all. Similarly, mere re-telling of the story earns only limited credit. The main focus of responses should be on the key terms of the question, and how these apply to the actual text.

In the poetry section, Hardy and *Songs of Ourselves* were the most popular options, with relatively few attempting *Poems Deep and Dangerous*. In the prose section, *The Siege* and *Stories of Ourselves* were most popular, with a good following for *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*.

## Comments on Specific Questions

### Section A

#### THOMAS HARDY: *Selected Poems*

##### Question 1

This was slightly less popular as an option than **Question 2**. *The Convergence of the Twain* was the preferred option of the two poems available, perhaps understandably, as the events it relates to are so widely known. Whichever option was chosen, candidates showed a tendency to offer an explanation or 'translation' of the poem rather than consider the key terms of the question: 'a vivid picture of the natural world'. This led to the production of a good deal of material which, while showing knowledge and some understanding of the poem, was at best marginally relevant to the question. There was only limited consideration of the language of the chosen poem, although the term 'vivid picture' should have provided a strong prompt to candidates that this was required.

##### Question 2

This was the more popular Hardy option, and was generally more successfully attempted. Most candidates accepted the invitation in the question to look at Hardy's words and images, and some good points were made about contrasts such as the dead smile and the 'grin of bitterness'. There was some over-ingenious interpretation at times, particularly of the 'ominous bird a-wing', and that, and some other phrases within the poem ('chidden of God' and 'God-curst sun' for example) proved problematic for some candidates. Some candidates who looked at individual words and phrases hung back from making an explicit link between their comments on images and the 'so sad' of the question, offering explanations rather than exploring effects.

#### From JO PHILLIPS, ed.: *Poems Deep & Dangerous*

##### Question 3

The few who attempted this tended to explain or describe the poem rather than concentrate on Lochhead's feelings about her sister and how they are vividly conveyed. There was some awareness of the symbolic function of the shoes, although never very fully developed.

##### Question 4

As with Lochhead, approaches here were largely explanatory, with preliminary biographical information about the poet. Although the basic idea that love does not alter when all around it changes was securely understood, responses rarely went much further. Some of the images within the poem were explained, although there was no real exploration of their power.

#### SONGS OF OURSELVES: *from Part 4*

##### Question 5

This was a popular option, and some very strong responses were produced. Most candidates found something to say about the last 11 lines of the poem, dealing with the questions posed therein. Stronger responses often considered the less obvious sense of oppression that emerges in the first part of the poem, commenting usefully on the references made to sin. Some responses made telling reference to the title of the poem. Candidates who looked closely at the language of the poem were generally more successful than those who wrote in general terms about oppression of Indians by Europeans in general, or the British in particular, with only occasional reference to the words of the poem.

##### Question 6

This, too, was a popular option, and was often handled very well. Most candidates moved beyond offering a paraphrase of the poem and dealt well with the speaker's state of mind, commenting usefully on the speaker's posture in the second stanza, and making some acute comments on the 'three cups in one' of the woodspurge, and on the reference to 'perfect grief'. Despite the poem's relative brevity, some candidates spent so long on discussing the first two stanzas that they made little or no reference to the woodspurge, limiting the scope of their responses.

**Section B**

**JANE AUSTEN: *Northanger Abbey***

**Question 7**

Too few responses were seen to make general comment meaningful.

**Question 8**

Too few responses were seen to make general comment meaningful.

**TSITSI DANGAREMBGA: *Nervous Conditions***

**Question 9**

Too few responses were seen to make general comment meaningful.

**Question 10**

Too few responses were seen to make general comment meaningful.

**ANITA DESAI: *Fasting, Feasting***

**Question 11**

Candidates who offered responses to this question usually showed understanding of what was happening during the extract, and made some attempt to explain why it was amusing. There was some comprehension of Mama and Papa's lack of welcome, and Uma's contrasting enthusiasm, but little appreciation of the subtleties of the extract and scant examination of Desai's writing.

**Question 12**

The few who attempted this question focused almost exclusively on Uma's difficulties, rather than the difficulties of family life, which rendered their responses only partly relevant. Her marital difficulties with her in-laws were relevant, whereas her struggles at school were less so. Although the question was very open and there was no requirement to cover any particular part of the novel, it was noteworthy that no coverage was offered of the 'Feasting' section of the book and the dysfunctionality of the Patton family.

**HELEN DUNMORE: *The Siege***

**Question 13**

This was the most popular question on the paper, and many candidates took the opportunity to explore Dunmore's writing closely to demonstrate how it vividly conveys what life was like under siege conditions. For most, the main focus was the importance of flour and bread, and there were some strong responses to some of the imagery such as 'as if from the lips of heaven'. There was also some misunderstanding of other images, notably the image of the wild duck, which a significant number of candidates interpreted literally, as though a wild duck was actually present in the bread queue. There was a tendency for candidates to focus on the first part of the extract, with much less attention paid to Anna's preparations for the walk to the bakery, and some misinterpretation of the cherry-wood walking-stick, which some thought was going to serve as an offensive rather than a defensive weapon. Some candidates paid too little attention to the extract, writing more generally about life under siege conditions. While material drawn from elsewhere in a text can be used, the focus in an extract question should be on the extract itself, with wider reference used, for example, to contextualise what is printed on the paper.

**Question 14**

This was not a popular choice, but nearly all of those who attempted it focused on Anna and Andrei's relationship, with a reasonable selection of supporting detail. The other relationship covered was that between Marina and Mikhail. Although there was usually adequate textual knowledge in evidence, there was very little consideration of 'powerfully portrays'.

**GEORGE ELIOT: *Silas Marner***

Too few responses were seen to make general comment meaningful.

**SUSAN HILL: *I'm the King of the Castle***

**Question 17**

Candidates tackling this question tended to restrict their answers to a consideration of Kingshaw's attitudes, with limited attention to the 'changing relationships' of the question. Stronger answers which contextualised the conversation were rare: the knowledge that Kingshaw had not wanted Fielding to come, and his anticipation of the threatened move to Hooper's school, and Hooper's unfamiliarity with Fielding could all have yielded fruitful material, but were not really explored.

**Question 18**

Too few responses were seen to make general comment meaningful.

**ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON: *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde***

**Question 19**

This question was generally quite well handled by those who attempted it. Responses identified several dramatic features of the extract, often relating them quite well to context, and the language was often probed to good effect. Some answers limited themselves by paying too much attention to the historical context of Victorian England at the expense of closer attention to the details of Stevenson's writing.

**Question 20**

This question also elicited some strong responses, focusing quite well on how the contrast between the two characters is presented. What characterised more successful answers was the breadth and depth of textual detail used in support of the points made.

**From *Stories of Ourselves***

**Question 21**

This was a popular question and some strong answers were produced. They were often characterised by close attention to the language of the passage, and there were some sensitive and persuasive attempts to explore the symbolism of sea and sand in terms of the narrator's relationship with her husband, with some subtle probing of the imagery of the opening paragraphs. Although there was no requirement to move outside the passage, some candidates used their knowledge of the story as a whole to good effect; others merely re-told the story.

**Question 22**

Candidates opted to write about *My Greatest Ambition* in preference to *Her First Ball* by a majority of about four to one. Whichever choice was made, some solid responses were produced, showing good knowledge of the chosen story. This knowledge was not always specifically shaped to answer the question, and many responses seemed to assume that merely re-telling the story would self-evidently demonstrate the central character's likeability. There was a good deal of admiration for the apparent precocity of the narrator in Lurie's story, which seemed to assume that admirableness and likeability are synonymous. Responses to Mansfield, though fewer in number, were often better directed to the actual question, although the effects of the third-person narrative were seldom explicitly considered.

# LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

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Paper 0486/22

Drama

## Key Messages

- The strongest answers to this drama paper responded to features of the genre, such as entrances, stage directions, action, dialogue, sound, exits and audience reaction. On the other hand, some answers treated texts as though they were prose texts intended to be read rather than watched by an audience.
- In answer to passage-based questions, candidates needed to select material from the whole passage, support their views with quotations from it and make some response to the use of language as well as to the author's craft as a playwright.
- The strongest answers to discursive questions were from candidates who formed a clear response to the whole question, developed points, used wide-ranging supporting details from the text and offered direct quotations from it. They avoided unnecessarily narrating the plot.
- An ability to consider the playwright's methods and the audience's response was evident in the best answers.

## General Comments

There were sound responses to the passage-based questions which demonstrated clear critical understanding of the set texts. Candidates showed understanding and empathy for the situation of characters within texts, in particular for Kate in *All My Sons* and for Prospero in *The Tempest*. The strongest answers supported their comments by evaluating the dramatic devices used by the author to present the character on stage. Some answers treated the text as prose. With the passage-based questions, briefly placing the passage within the context of the play often helped to illustrate an aspect of an answer, but occasionally candidates spent too much of their answer in retelling the narrative.

The strongest answers to discursive questions retained their focus on the question throughout, and used relevant quotations and details from the text to support points made. The best answers acknowledged the text as drama by considering the author's methods and an audience's response to dramatic features. For example, in *All My Sons*, the apple tree is on stage throughout as a visual reminder (to the audience as well as the characters) of the family's son Larry, since it was planted in memory of him.

Candidates' enjoyment of the texts was often apparent, particularly in their varied responses to humour, for example to Stephano and Trinculo in *The Tempest*, or to the imposing Lady Bracknell in *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Candidates usually expressed their personal responses to a text throughout their answers. There does not need to be a separate section written at the end; this tends to distance the response from a focus on the question.

## Comments on Specific Questions

### Question 1

Most candidates were sympathetic with Kate's distress in this scene. The strongest answers focused on the details of the passage, and so commented on such items as the implications of Kate's "accusing undertone" in the first line stage directions; the effect of Miller directing Kate's simple statement "He's not going to marry her" as both "a warning and a question"; or Kate's aversion to the use of the word "jail", revealing her concern and perhaps guilt at Joe's actions. Some candidates offered a more balanced response by

qualifying their sympathy for Kate's situation with criticism of her irrational belief in Larry's return and insistence that her family believe the same. Other answers needed to develop their explanation of how Larry had been killed and why Kate believes he is alive, to include more detailed analysis of the passage.

## Question 2

This was a popular question and was generally well answered. Candidates tended to focus on how Larry's death has affected Kate and Ann, although his death profoundly affected every character in the play. Some answers treated the text as prose, but stronger answers considered some of the effects of staging the play. For example, how the apple tree on stage is used as a symbol for Larry, with some development to consider the implications of its being blown down, or the dramatic way Ann produces Larry's last letter towards the end of the play. Attention to the wording of the question often indicated a strong answer: Larry was seen as 'powerful' because the fact of his life or death influences what the characters do. His letter to Ann initiates Joe's suicide. Some answers needed to develop further from a narration and explanation of the plot.

## Questions 3 and 4

There were too few answers to make general comment appropriate.

## Question 5

Answers to this question often showed good knowledge of Portia's character, with comments supported by text from the passage. Sometimes quoted text was very long, and it was not clear which part of the quotation was offered in support. Most candidates considered: Portia's beauty, youth and station in life; her treatment of Nerissa as an equal; the conditions placed on her marriage by her dead father; and her intelligence and sharp wit revealed in the harsh comments on her suitors. Some answers focused on the role of the caskets in the narrative of the plot, while stronger answers were developed to make a direct response to 'striking' by evaluating the writing. The strongest answers had a focus on the language of the passage without paraphrasing or explaining it, and avoided lengthy introductions to Elizabethan life or to Shakespeare's background.

## Questions 6, 7 and 8

There were too few answers to make general comment appropriate.

## Question 9

Candidates showed strong sympathy for the treatment of Prospero as retold in the passage. There were some excellent answers in which candidates responded sensitively to the writing. For example, some candidates considered how the image of the creeping ivy is used to mirror Antonio's creeping grasp on power, or how the lack of seaworthiness of the boat in which Prospero and the baby Miranda were cast adrift is conveyed in the image of a 'rotten carcass'. These answers had a strong focus on how Shakespeare uses language throughout the passage, and were able to consider the effects produced on an audience.

## Question 10

The role of Stephano and Trinculo in providing humour was well understood. Many candidates successfully explored how these characters are portrayed as 'ridiculous', particularly in Act 2 Scene 2. Fewer candidates developed further to consider how they are also 'disturbing', for example in their ready manipulation of Caliban, or their willingness to kill Prospero. There was some misinterpretation of 'disturbing' as 'disrupting', where some candidates described how Stephano and Trinculo disrupt the action of the play. Strong answers used relevant material selected from throughout the whole text in response to the question, without narrating the plot.

## Question 11

Many candidates found the ridiculous plot entertaining. There was much to consider: the christenings, the friendship of Dr Chasuble and Miss Prism; Lady Bracknell's recognition of Miss Prism; and the revelation of the manuscript/baby confusion, and Jack's resultant excitement. Some candidates relied heavily on a narrative approach by retelling the plot before and after the passage, and explaining the passage itself. There were some excellent answers which focused on dramatic techniques used in the passage, such as the entrance of Miss Prism; the visual confrontation on stage of the 'crushed' Miss Prism by the imposing Lady Bracknell; and the suspense of the slow revelation of Miss Prism's earlier error. Stage directions were often

profitably explored to show the author's dramatic methods, for example the use of 'a pause' to create suspense, or the significance of 'noises' offstage at the end of the passage. The dramatic presentation of Lady Bracknell was often viewed as 'entertaining', for example, her 'stony glare' and 'judicial voice', as well as the ridiculous things she says.

### **Question 12**

Candidates often placed Algernon within his Victorian setting. They saw his secret life, using 'Bunbury' to get out of boring engagements, as also providing some excitement in a society which values appearance over reality. Algernon's views on marriage as 'tedious' were explored, along with his desire to get married by the end of the play. Often candidates needed to use more detail from the text and quotations to support points, and to avoid repetition. A closer focus on the terms of the question was often needed: it would have been appropriate to identify clearly some of Algernon's 'foolishness', and to consider how Wilde nevertheless encourages our 'affection' for Algernon by showing his genuine feeling for Cecily, or how his witty lines make the audience laugh.

# LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

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Paper 0486/32  
Drama (Open Text)

## Key Messages

- The strongest answers to this drama paper responded to features of the genre, such as entrances, stage directions, action, dialogue, sound, exits and audience reaction. Some answers treated texts as if they were prose texts intended to be read rather than watched by an audience.
- In answer to passage-based questions, in particular on Shakespeare, candidates needed to select material from the whole passage, support their views with quotations from it and make some response to the use of language as well as to the author's craft as a playwright.
- The strongest answers to discursive questions were from candidates who formed a clear response to the whole question, developed points, used wide-ranging supporting details from the text and offered direct quotations from it. They avoided unnecessarily narrating the plot.
- An ability to consider the playwright's methods and the audience's response was evident in the best answers.

## General Comments

Candidates showed a good knowledge and understanding of their set texts and often demonstrated a high level of engagement with them. The majority of answers were to passage-based questions. Good answers focused closely on the whole of the printed passage and used the text to support their response. Some candidates usefully considered the context of the passage within the play where it shed light on an aspect of their answer, but occasionally a candidate's lengthy retelling of the plot took their focus away from answering the question.

Candidates' enjoyment of the texts was often apparent, particularly in their often varied responses to humour, for example to Portia's witty assessment of her suitors in *The Merchant of Venice*, or to the visual contrast on stage of the imposing Lady Bracknell to the intimidated Miss Prism in *The Importance of Being Earnest*.

## Comments on Specific Questions

Comments below relate to all answers where there were sufficient responses to individual questions to make general comments appropriate.

### **Question 5**

Most candidates had formed a sound view of Portia's character, and were able to describe various traits such as her kindness and friendliness, evidence by reference to her treatment of Nerissa as an equal in the passage, or her frustration with her life, supported by considering the limitations on the selection of her husband. The casket challenge was often the focus of answers which sometimes spent too long considering the plot, rather than answering the question. Candidates often referred to the fact that another side to Portia's character was shown in the passage, that of her cruel mockery of the suitors, but only the stronger answers quoted from the passage in support of this, and very few analysed her comments to show understanding of how language is used. Stronger answers focussed firmly on 'striking', and considered both audience anticipation to see what Portia is like following Bassanio's fulsome praise of her and also the implications of her intelligence and strength of character for later in the play when she acts as a lawyer.



### Question 6

The majority of responses to this question were able to answer convincingly on the 'significance' of the relationship between Jessica and Lorenzo. Stronger answers used support from throughout the text, while weaker answers asserted views without supporting them. A main focus was what the relationship revealed about Shylock: both his unpleasantness, with his daughter eager to leave him and steal from him, and also his more human side as he is shown to be devastated by his daughter's betrayal. However, weaker answers spent too long on Shylock. Fewer answers considered the 'memorable' part of the question. Stronger answers here considered how Shakespeare presents the relationship within the play as a whole, and saw the expression of their obvious love as a backdrop for the love between both Nerissa and Gratiano, and Portia and Bassanio. This is especially evident at the beginning of Act 5, when Jessica and Lorenzo set a romantic atmosphere for the denouement of the play in Belmont.

### Question 11

All answers to *The Importance of Being Earnest* were in response to this question. Responses were generally of a high quality. Most candidates usefully described the context of the christenings. Wilde's presentation of Lady Bracknell was a profitable focus for a question on 'entertaining'. Many candidates considered her comments to be ridiculous and humorous, and analysed the language she uses as extreme and bombastic. Her imperious tone was also seen as 'entertaining'. The stage directions were a fruitful source of evidence here too. Some candidates were especially aware of the text on stage, as they also considered the loudness of Lady Bracknell's voice and her imposing appearance on stage, in particular as a contrast to the 'crushed' Miss Prism. The dramatic significance of the passage was also selected for comment, as it sets up the revelation of Jack's true identity for the audience to piece together. Some candidates developed their analysis of the ridiculousness of the situation presented on stage. They showed their understanding of the author's intention of ridiculing the shallowness of the society in which he lived, where a respectable appearance is all, as it is to Lady Bracknell. Overall, the high quality of the answers to this question was evident in the convincing analysis of the dramatic features of the text, as seen in the staging of, for example, tone, sound, stage directions, use of language, entrances, exits, noises off and action, as well as the narrative of the plot.

# LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

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Paper 0486/42

Unseen

## Key Messages

- The strongest responses were those which explored the implications of the question, looking closely at the writer's techniques and purposes, and explaining their effect on the reader.
- Candidates should be aware of the link between high achievement in this paper and all four Assessment Objectives for English Literature.
- Knowledge of the text is best demonstrated through frequent, brief quotation.
- Stronger candidates showed their understanding by exploring beyond surface narrative meaning and making a deeper interpretation of ideas, attitudes, allegory and symbolism.
- Analysis of the writer's use of language needs critical appreciation of its effect on the reader. Descriptive passages need close attention, for their implicit suggestions as well as their explicit meaning.
- Sensitive and informed personal response should include an overview of the impact and meaning of the whole text, and an interpretation of its overall meaning.

## General Comments

Most of the work seen in this session was strong, interesting and individual, suggesting that candidates had been well-prepared, found the texts fertile and engaging, and had the confidence to shape their own responses. Some scripts were very strong indeed and most showed that the candidate possessed the tools for critical analysis. Poetry answers showed awareness of poetic persona and form, supported by detailed attention to metaphorical language. Prose answers usually showed understanding of how a passage is coloured by the viewpoint of the narrator, and the ability to explore the implications of descriptive passages. Weaker scripts showed less confidence in advancing an interpretation of the whole text, and tended to read the surface narrative of the text, using quotations as textual support, instead of exploring the writer's purpose and choice of language. Some mid-range scripts showed analytical ability and identification of the writer's devices but had little to say about their effect, or lacked confidence in synthesising observations into an interpretation. Both passages depended a great deal on tone and mood: the tone created by the voice and viewpoint of the speaker or principal character, and the mood which is thus shared with the reader. Good candidates asked why the volcano was angry or Lev confused and melancholy.

It was encouraging to see that many candidates used the recommended reading time to plan and structure their responses. A few spent too long on drafting their ideas, and then found it difficult to complete their final responses, but most saw the benefit of noting a brief outline of their response to the text and a set of key observations or quotations before going on to structure an argument which answered the question. Good scripts tended to have a strong introduction which conveyed understanding of the text as a whole and its initial effect on the reader. These introductions made connections between the questions set and the way in which the writing of the text worked, before moving on to explore specific examples.

Candidates clearly make up their minds quickly between the poetry and prose questions, and poetry was more than twice as popular in this session. However, both questions attracted a range of responses, and were of equal difficulty. In both, the characterisation is communicated through language and tone, revealing a distinctive mood to each text. The voice of the dormant volcano, rumbling and angry with the potential to spit out destructively is very different from the self-communing melancholy of the outsider, Lev, new to the big city and with hopes for his family which he clearly will not find easy to fulfil. Nevertheless, both writers create distinctive characters whose viewpoint colours the descriptions they use, and good answers needed to make that link and explore the relationship between language and character, and indeed the reader's

response. Critical responses engaged with the reader's reaction to the mood created in the poem or passage. Are we sympathetic? Shocked? Disturbed? How does the writer provoke a strong response from the reader? Unseen passages necessarily leave many questions unanswered, but sensitive readers explore their reactions in response to details of language.

Quality of analysis tended to determine the marks awarded. Stronger scripts did not simply use textual reference for illustrative purposes but looked closely at why the writer had chosen particular words or descriptive phrases. They also showed the ability to relate observations about detail to an argument about the text as a whole, showing an understanding of its contrasts, apparent contradictions and time shifts. This is another case for a strong introduction with an overview of the text and an argument which addresses the question. Preparation for this paper can usefully point out the ways in which the criteria for success are related to all the Assessment Objectives for this subject. A skills-based approach can also enhance preparation for passage-based questions in other papers.

Understanding illustrated by textual reference needs to extend to the whole text, although candidates can select the details they especially wish to comment on, particularly in response to prose. However this needs to be in the context of a critical argument which directly addresses the question, and which highlights the ways in which language and characterisation reflect the writer's purpose and intended effect on the reader. A key difference among stronger scripts is that they show a bolder approach to the deeper implications of the text, looking beneath its surface to explore underlying themes and attitudes. In this sense, the unseen also addresses 'context': what kind of world is portrayed by the text and how do readers respond to it?

Assessment Objectives 3 and 4 test higher-order skills of analysis, synthesis and evaluation, and it was pleasing to read many scripts which showed remarkably high achievement under these criteria. The quality of comment after quotation has a strong influence on reward: is comment general or focused on the specific words and implications of the text? Do comments advance an interpretation or argument about the text? Are contrasts and contradictions acknowledged and explained? Good scripts bring a series of observations together in a synthesis, leading to an overall evaluation of the text. This is the meaning of a 'convincing and relevant personal response'.

Strong responses were not necessarily long ones. Good management of argument often led to succinct answers with brief but pertinent illustration and sharply-focused comment. Details for analysis were selectively treated, but given sensitive interpretation, and arguments sustained with a consistent sense of direction and purpose. It was especially noticeable that answers placed within the top two bands were cogently expressed, integrating purposive analysis of writer's effects within an individual and often original response to the whole text.

Centres which enter students for this paper are well-advised to make study of the unseen an integral part of their Literature course, and to draw attention to ways in which it can focus attention on the reading skills and confidence in written argument which students develop throughout that course. The best answers skilfully balance out linguistic analysis and reasoned personal response, and mid-range candidates should be encouraged to look at past papers and model answers in order to learn how they can best meet all the criteria for success.

### **Comments on Specific Questions**

#### **Question 1**

Candidates responded with engagement and interest to the poem *Volcano* by Ivan Van Sertima, which can be found in *The Penguin Book of Caribbean Verse in English*. The rubric ensured that all could easily follow the surface narrative of the poem, and were clear about its references to other volcanoes and their histories. A few thought this volcano was Vesuvius, which could work, and all understood the references to its 'cousin' Krakatoa. Good answers needed to show a willingness to go below the surface and explore the bubbling irritation and anger of the volcano, exploring why its thunder might not remain buried 'deep too deep' for ever. The best responses appreciated the text's potential for allegorical meaning and saw that it might express buried anger, or a voice that has chosen to remain silent but with potential for destructive expression. Most appreciated that the volcano is personified and that a human voice is given to a force for nature, and the most interesting interpretations appreciated the broader implications of links between human feelings and destructive forces. Is this the voice of nature which has been spited or ignored and has the potential for revenge? Or is it a metaphor for a person with suppressed anger and potential for violent eruption, despite surface silence or dormancy? Good candidates explored both these views after careful evaluation of the evidence.

The focus of the question was on how the poet powerfully portrays the volcano to the reader. The bullet points initially invited candidates to work their way through the 'narrative' of the poem, whilst responding to the vividness of the portrayal of the volcano, and allowed candidates to consider the symbolic element in the potential eruption. The question was left as open as possible so that the candidates could respond to the nature of the volcano and its latent power. Many candidates linked form to the way the volcano says that it speaks 'with no urgent rumblings in my voice'. Enjambment and irregular line lengths make the volcano's expression fluent but unpredictable, a reflection of its nature and mood. There were intelligent comments on how the three negations in lines 2 – 4 are contradicted by the hissing sibilance which suggest the potential for an outflow of lava, even if that flow is chilled and constrained by snow and silence in this part of the description. Good answers appreciated that the poem pivots around a 'but' in line 20, and the contrast shapes the mood of the poem. Time is also personified in the poem as the force which has 'muted' and 'chilled' the volcano, but the voice asserts its past and future existence as well as the frustrations of its present dormant state.

Stronger scripts explored the implications of language more fully. Some explored the contrast between the calm exterior of the volcano and the heat and noise within, or made a reasonably developed response to the contrast between what it used to be and what it is now. They explored the vividness of the language such as the suggestion of a wound in the 'incandescent cone of angry flesh' or the alliteration of 'black brimstone broils', with its suggestion of a hellish and destructive inferno. Some noticed the links between the volcano and other manifestations of nature's power such as craters and thunder. More developed answers explored the deeper implications, such as the comparison between the hidden wrath of this volcano and the world rocking eruption of Krakatoa. This volcano clearly has the potential to be as destructive and shocking as its 'cousin' if it chooses. Some candidates read this as a warning, some as menacing, and others as an expression of the volcano's frustration. What was important was that they recognised the power and effect on readers of this characterisation of the volcano's voice, and the otherness of its unusual perspective, as well as its more recognisably human emotions. Its shaking 'fist' has the potential to 'submerge' 'old orthodoxies' so the poem presents a challenge to expected certainties.

Strong answers explored beyond surface meaning, analysing language in depth, sensitivity and detail to evaluate and support their own personal response. These candidates engaged more fully with the idea of suppressed internal wrath and imagery of the volcano as almost frozen in time. Many produced a developed or sensitive response to the patterns of the volcano's language, including the ways in which these are expressed poetically through repetition, enjambment and a rhythm which starts and stops. The past is buried beneath 'high snow' and a brimstone 'furnace' is caged within its craters. Exploration of these metaphors and of the patterns of alliteration which give coherence and sometimes violent expression to the volcano's voice was essential for higher marks. Good answers also considered the volcano's history and genealogy, and its pride in its past as indicating potential for a future more expressive than its dormant present state.

Candidates at the top end of the mark range distinguished themselves by their response to the final six lines of the poem, where the reader is strongly addressed and warned of a world-changing eruption. The final bullet point is often best considered as an opportunity to evaluate and interpret the overall impact of the writing, as well as a reminder of the importance of the way a writer chooses to close his text. Some candidates were shocked or disgusted by the imagery with which the volcano conveys its anger as 'this vomit venture up my lips again', reflecting on how the writing portrays a fierce and frustrated tone. Others noted the potential for 'the molten magma of my wrath' to convert buried anger into destructive energy. It was up to the candidates to decide what the volcano's reasons for wrath may be and what the 'old orthodoxies' it wished to bury might represent, and Examiners were pleased to accept any personal, well-considered response to the symbolism and wider significance of these lines. Some saw the 'long forgotten' as acquiring a voice which could become angry and urgent. Strong answers combined interpretative ability with a critical response to the effects of the structure of the poet, and the techniques used by the poet to express powerful feelings in a memorable way. Sensitive engagement with the language, whatever the selection of material, was always highly rewarded.

## Question 2

Although the extract from Rose Tremain's *The Road Home*, from a chapter called *The Diana Card*, proved less popular, it provided equal opportunities to consider tone and narrative voice. Lev, an Eastern European economic migrant recently arrived in London, also reflects on his past, his discomfort in the present, and expresses hopes and dreams for the future, although these seem unlikely to be achieved. Strong responses considered the melancholy of the narrative voice and appreciated reasons for his state of alienation. His wife's death, his own sense of guilt and inadequacy and his thoughts about what he has left behind at home received detailed attention, with many able to see how the writer creates sympathy for his situation, although there were some who simply felt he was lazy. The purchase of the 'Diana card' suggests his desire to make

amends and find some expression of both his self-pity and his desire to give his mother and daughter something to hope for.

The focus of the question was the vivid depiction of Lev's feelings at this significant moment in his life. He has the new arrival's feelings of alienation and strangeness. He is not a tourist and is conspicuously poorer than the inhabitants of London and, at this moment, has no plan of what to do or where to go. His feelings about home are a mixture of guilt at his past moodiness and aspiration to make a success of this new opportunity to send money home, and maybe one day even bring his family to London.

The bullet points especially encouraged candidates to explore the ways in which Lev's comparison of himself and the tourists and joggers reveals his envy of their purposefulness, and the finite quality of their journeys as compared to the infinite nature of his. They are carefree and he is pained by confusion and worry. The description of Lev's behaviour at home reveals the indolence and despair caused by his grief, but he also feels that he can make amends by becoming his family's saviour, a rich man-of-the-world, with a detailed knowledge of this strange city. Differentiation tended to stem from the extent to which candidates could respond to the third bullet and look at how Tremain's language conveys a sense of unease in the passage as a whole.

It was therefore important to move beyond a purely narrative account of Lev's travails, and to make a critical examination of the reasons behind his feelings and observations. Good candidates responded to some of the language that creates a sense of the newness of the environment and of his guilt about home. Some found sadness in the pathetic way in which Lev is 'proud' of his basic money transaction and noted that the food brought no comfort - feeling 'rich and burning', just as the Coca-Cola 'pinches' at his teeth. His poverty and difference from the tourists and the denizens of the city are marked by all kinds of descriptive detail: the linen tea towels are too expensive; he does not know the name of the tall bridge or the giant white wheel; and he 'envies' the 'carefree' tourists. The noise of the joggers' trainers is a 'reproach', he has been 'moody, melancholy and short tempered' and prostrate - 'had lain...lay and looked at the clouds'. He berates himself for his laziness and thoughtlessness. His attempts to jog himself out of this melancholy frame of mind are not fully convincing. There was plenty of response to his current sadness and alienation, even if not all were sympathetic to its sources. Stronger answers appreciated the writer's manipulation of time and memory, and explored the ways in which Lev integrates his guilty memories of his reaction to the death of his wife with his present discontent.

Strong answers used Lev's description of the river and observations about the tourists as springboards for an investigation of his own troubled state of mind, going beyond surface meaning to analyse language in depth, sensitivity and detail. He is drawn to the 'opalescent grey-green' of the river rather than the blue sky, and there is clearly a link between his thoughts about 'all the centuries of dark mud beneath' and the darkness of his own recent past. This image quickly took strong candidates deeper beneath the surface to examine his underlying unhappiness. Candidates noted how he 'envied' the apparently 'carefree' tourists, and that their 'ease' and 'finite' journeys provoke him to draw a contrast with his uneasy thoughts and apparently infinite journey to find a way to support his family. There were some strong responses to the ways in which the 'scuff and squeak' of the joggers seemed to rebuke him for lacking the same drive towards self-improvement and encourage self-reproach and guilt over his own 'laziness' and unfairness to Ina and Maya. Candidates differed in their degree of sympathy for him, but the best were able to evaluate their own personal response and relate this to the writer's use of language.

Candidates at the top end of the mark range certainly responded to the underlying sense of alienation and melancholy in the passage, and often commented on the questionable realism of Lev's hopes for the future, and vision of himself as a 'man of the world'. He becomes suddenly cold, in a way which harshly interrupts his day-dream of a better future. Good responses to prose show awareness that the writer's choice of descriptive details is always significant, contributing to tone and mood. For example, Princess Diana on the card may show her 'famous, heartbreaking smile' but also her 'startling and sad' blue eyes. He feels 'exhausted...spent, lame' and at the end of his endurance by the time the passage ends, desperate for somewhere to lay his head. Sensitive engagement with the language showed awareness of the complexity of Lev's feelings. There was detailed appreciation of the ways in which description of his physical senses drew readers in, to share his deeper feelings and doubts. 'Confusion and worry' are personified to portray the extent to which he feels assailed. Depth of understanding was demonstrated by exploring the reasons for his uneasiness. Choice of details which brought out how alienated he is by both the place and people he sees was strongly rewarded. Candidates often showed a sensitive appreciation of why this is a sad and unsettling piece of writing, with sympathy for the immigrant experience and hopes for a better future.