

# LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

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**Paper 0486/11**  
**Poetry and Prose 11**

## **Key Messages**

In order to do well in this subject, candidates should be discouraged from:

- writing long introductions explaining what they are going to do, or summarising the whole of their answer in advance
- writing long conclusions repeating what has already been said
- giving a great deal of unneeded biographical information
- commenting on how the use of commas and colons adds to the mood and tone of a poem
- commenting on rhyme schemes and verse forms without relating them to the question
- using the passage from the passage-based question to answer the discursive question on a text.

And most significantly:

- treating a poem or passage as an Unseen exercise.

Success will come from:

- a relevant and carefully argued response to the question
- detailed knowledge supporting the points made
- careful commentary on the writer's choice of words and on the effects created
- an individual and perceptive personal response.

## **General Comments**

This was the first November session for the new specification with the two question format. There were very few rubric errors and very few examples of rushed or incomplete final answers. There were a few examples of candidates answering more than the requisite number of questions, but this seemed to be less prevalent than in previous years. There was no change to the style of the questions but all the poems were printed on the paper, which candidates obviously found of benefit, though in some cases they appeared to be relying on this rather than on their previously acquired knowledge since there was insufficient focus on exploration of the language effects.

In the prose section, the most radical change was that this was a closed book examination. For a long time the passage-based questions have been significantly more popular than the discursive ones, and there was no change to this. Those candidates who did attempt the general questions often achieved good marks because of the quality of their engagement with the text and the persuasiveness of their arguments, though they were often over-reliant on generalisations and could have benefited from even just a little more specific reference. There are still too many examples of essay questions being answered by candidates exclusively using the material in the passage of the question before on the same text. Candidates need to be reminded that the passage is principally relevant only to the question which is asked on it; using it as the basis of an answer to the second question on the text in question is always going to be, at best, self-limiting and in some cases completely irrelevant.

There was much admirable work from all parts of the world and it is a constant pleasure to read the scripts of candidates who clearly love the subject and engage with their set texts. The best answers were full of well supported personal responses to the questions set, and showed sensitivity to the writers' methods and intentions.

When candidates performed less well, it was usually because they had not adhered closely enough to the terms of the question. Candidates still do not spend enough time on identifying the key words of the question and tailoring their knowledge and understanding to these words. In previous reports, we have made the point that it is worth spending five minutes on underlining the key words and creating a brief plan relating to them before beginning writing. Many candidates do not appear to plan their answers at all before embarking on them. More successful responses make relevant selections from extracts and poems in answering the question, rather than slavishly working through the text. These stronger responses can, as it were, see the wood for the trees and shape more carefully-crafted arguments with pertinent textual support. Their responses keep the question clearly in focus throughout.

In the poetry section many candidates wrote down everything they had been taught about the poem rather than selecting relevant material to form a coherent response to the question. So many times it was obvious that the intensifiers in the question, the words such as 'vividly', 'dramatically', 'memorably', had been ignored because there was no response to the quality of the writing. All questions offer the opportunity to address AO 3 'recognise and appreciate ways in which writers use language, structure and form to create and shape meanings and effects', and without an attempt to engage with the writing answers will not reach the higher Bands. The most successful poetry answers explored the precise effects of words and sounds in poems. A close appreciation was, by contrast, not demonstrated by listing a number of quotations and adding only a general comment that the words are vivid or powerful. Listing key words and labelling them a 'semantic field' is in itself description and not analysis. Literary terms can be useful in making concise reference to aspects of the writing, but they *serve* the analysis and do not constitute the analysis itself. Less successful responses often worked through an extract or a poem logging literary devices in an explanatory fashion: e.g. 'This metaphor means...'; 'the poem has an ababab rhyme scheme...'.

Too often candidates included biographical details (particularly with the Hardy poems) in the mistaken belief presumably that these counted as literary comments.

The strongest essays deployed quotation judiciously – that is to say, used only those words actually required to substantiate the point being made and integrated them into own sentences. Excessively long quotations can at best be only inert illustrations of a point, and not an opportunity for close textual analysis. Some candidates used ellipsis to reduce the length of their quotations, but often in so doing cut out the very words that would most usefully support the point being made. Some referred only to line numbers, which demonstrated very little in terms of commentary.

The topping and tailing of essays with general comment is not to the candidate's advantage. Lengthy 'courtesy' introductions setting out what the candidate will do and 'conclusions' which merely re-state points already made (sometimes at inordinate length) have this in common: they reduce the time available to the candidate for the close exploration of how writers achieve their effects. By contrast, succinct introductions which get to grips straight away with the key words of the question enable candidates to focus from the start.

## **Comments on Specific Questions**

### **Section A**

#### **Question 1**

**Explore the ways in which Hardy creates a vivid sense that some things do not change despite the passage of time in both *In Time of 'The Breaking of Nations'* and part two of *The Pine Planters*.**

Relatively few candidates attempted either Hardy question. Those who chose this option tended to offer accounts of both poems, with limited attention to the actual wording of the question. There was some identification of features of permanence, but a number of misapprehensions recurred, notably that the actions of the first two stanzas of the first poem took place on a battlefield. The contextual significance of Marty South's Reverie was not generally understood.

## Question 2

### How do Hardy's words and images make *At the Word 'Farewell'* so moving?

Answers varied considerably in quality, but most candidates who tackled this question showed limited understanding of the poem itself. There was some engagement with some individual words and images, with an attempt to explain them, but little consideration of the key word 'moving'. Some candidates appeared to have interpreted the word in terms of physical movement out of and back into the house. This is a term which occurs fairly frequently in questions on this paper, and candidates would benefit from having this key term clarified in preparation for the examination.

## Question 3

### How does Rossetti vividly convey the speaker's desire to revisit the past in *Sonnet: I wish I could remember that first day*?

Candidates were generally able to understand the tone of regret in the poem, and often were able to identify the sonnet form and comment on the rhyme scheme. However, relatively few were able to progress much further than repeating the same idea – that 'she wanted to go back' – over and over. The few who explored the language in some detail and identified some of the nuances and changes of tone in the poem were able to achieve high reward.

## Question 4

### How does McCarthy strikingly imagine her son's teenage years in *Football after School*?

Most candidates who attempted this question were able to recognise and understand some of the mother's fears and hopes for her son. However, the poet's use of imagery was unevenly handled. Some of the more violent images and diction were identified and commented on, but the extended metaphor was seldom dealt with very effectively. Some candidates were a little uncertain about the time frame of the poem, thinking the son had already reached teenage years. Relatively few commented on the mother's recognition of her own fragility, although one candidate saw the 'sun/football' metaphor as expressing the boy replacing the mother as central to his life: such comment indicates an ability to see some of the deeper implications of the writing.

## Question 5

### How does Wordsworth powerfully convey his feelings on looking at London in his poem *Sonnet: Composed Upon Westminster Bridge*?

The *Songs of Ourselves* anthology was by far the most popular poetry text, and both questions attracted many takers. Most candidates were able to say something about the scene, often using quotation extensively, sometimes at the expense of comment. Some candidates were side-tracked by background knowledge of the Industrial Revolution into making that the main thrust of their reading. Others clearly assumed that Wordsworth was writing about a modern city, and commented on the absence of noise from cars and factories. Those candidates who went on to consider Wordsworth's feelings and how they were presented usually identified the sense of admiration, and some went on to comment on how surprising this was, given Wordsworth's 'Romantic' poetic love of nature. Some of the stronger responses were able to analyse how poetic features helped to create meaning: other, weaker, answers merely listed some features. The garment simile was often identified but very rarely effectively analysed.

## Question 6

### Explore the ways in which Wright vividly recreates the experience described in *Hunting Snake*.

Overall, this was the most popular question on the entire paper, and proved accessible for nearly all who attempted it. The mixed response of fear and admiration was clearly identified by most, and the mixture of light and dark, black and diamond, warmth and cold provided material for comment. Many candidates produced competent responses, showing some engagement with the writer's techniques. However, some candidates went on to offer interpretations which could only be tenuously linked to the text. These included the walkers representing Adam and Eve, on the basis that a snake was involved; the snake being Moses, because of the resemblance of the 'parting grass' to the parting of the Red Sea; the involvement of knights in

armour, picking up on 'quested'; the snake as somehow a representative of the mis-treated aboriginal population of Australia. Although none of these interpretations is categorically 'wrong', all needed much fuller and closer argument from the text in order to convince. In most cases, the chosen interpretation was asserted with little or no supporting argument. This approach unnecessarily complicated the question, which referred to the 'experience', and could have been more than adequately answered by dealing with the poem as being about two or more people who, while out for a walk, see a snake cross their path while it is hunting.

## **Section B**

### **Question 7**

**How does Austen make this moment in the novel so dramatic?**

Most candidates were able to comment on the conflict between Catherine and Thorpe, and understood that she was angry, and disappointed not to be with the Tilneys. A few were able to comment usefully on the language, in particular the dialogue, and there was some well-applied background knowledge about Catherine's interest in the Gothic, and what Blaize Castle in particular meant to her. Although very much a minority text in terms of numbers of responses, it had clearly been studied with some enjoyment.

### **Question 8**

**To what extent does Austen's writing persuade you that Catherine grows up because of her experiences?**

Very few candidates attempted this question. Those who did often relied mainly – in some cases entirely – on the **question 7** extract, with obvious self-limiting consequences. Other responses tended to rely on broad narrative and often showed only a hazy knowledge of the novel, offering generalised comments about her relationships with Isabella and John Thorpe.

### **Question 9**

**How does Dangarembga make this such a significant moment in the novel?**

This novel seems to lend itself to study in terms of themes in particular, and responses to the extract tended to focus particularly on the theme of gender inequality, without considering character revelation or looking closely at Dangarembga's writing. There was some confusion over names and relationships. Lucia was generally better understood than any of the other characters, and there was some uncertainty about the precise context which meant that few if any candidates made any comment about Tambu's mother's attitude to her impending wedding.

### **Question 10**

**Explore the ways in which Dangarembga powerfully shows that women are not always dominated by men in the society of *Nervous Conditions*.**

A significant number of responses to this question referred only to the **question 9** extract, which was clearly self-limiting. There was a range of material available to candidates who knew the text, but where they moved beyond the extract, they tended to focus on only one or two of the characters – often Lucia and Nyasha – which limited the range of the response. Very few commented on Maiguru's leaving the family home, or, indeed on Tambu's own story beyond her selling of mealies as a child.

### **Question 11**

**In what ways does Desai make this such a dramatic moment in the novel?**

This was a reasonably popular text and question. Most candidates were able to demonstrate at least surface understanding of the extract, sometimes by means of simple paraphrase. Answers which went beyond this to demonstrate how it was dramatic had plenty of material to call upon. Papa's behaviour on the journey home often drew comment, and sometimes Aruna's questioning of Uma in the penultimate paragraph was considered. A few answers looked closely at Desai's writing, to show how this contributes to the overall

dramatic quality of the extract, and consequently scored quite high marks. There was almost universal sympathy for Uma, and understanding of her plight.

#### Question 12

##### **Who do you think Desai's writing suggests is a better mother – Mama or Mrs Patton?**

This was among the more popular non-extract questions, but was only rarely answered well. There was a noticeable tendency for the word 'mother' to be overlooked, so that a significant number of responses wrote about which of the two was a better person, essentially offering an assessment of the Indian and American ways of life. Most who made a choice opted for Mama, despite her shortcomings, seeing Mrs Patton as a consumerist. A few argued the opposite case. Very few suggested that Desai was not actually endorsing either mother, although some candidates did acknowledge that there was a similarity between the two. Few answers offered very much detail by way of textual substantiation.

#### Question 13

##### **How does Dunmore's writing make this moment in the novel so disturbing?**

This text was not particularly popular but a few candidates attempted the extract question. In some cases, the absence of any evidence of contextual knowledge suggested that candidates were treating the extract as an 'Unseen'. However, there were some strong answers exploring how terror is created through narrative methods and investigating language choices, which demonstrated a good understanding. These were, however, the exception rather than the rule.

#### Question 14

##### **In what ways does Dunmore memorably contrast Vera and Marina Petrovna in the novel?**

Too few answers were seen to make meaningful comment on this question.

#### Question 15

##### **How does Eliot make this conversation between Mr Macey and Ben Winthrop so amusing?**

There were very few answers to this question. Those who did attempt it were able to identify some of the humorous aspects of the conversation, without really identifying any of the deeper implications.

#### Question 16

##### **What does Eliot's writing make you feel about the community at Lantern Yard?**

Unusually, this was a more popular option than the extract question alternative, although *Silas Marner* was not a particularly popular choice of set text in this time zone. Some very good answers were seen, showing understanding of what Eliot was trying to achieve with the portrayal of Lantern Yard, with plenty of supporting detail. Some went beyond the beginning of the novel and commented on the disappearance of Lantern Yard. One or two confused Lantern Yard with Raveloe.

#### Question 17

##### **What impressions of the two boys does Hill's writing create for you at this moment in the novel?**

This was a popular question on one of the most popular texts in the Prose section of the paper. It was often well-answered, with a balanced view of each boy, and well-supported from the text. Stronger answers went beyond comments on character to explore some aspects of Hill's writing, for example the use of short sentences for effect. They often showed insight into the psychology of both boys, pointing out, for instance, how revealing it is that even in his unhappiness Kingshaw still thinks in terms of his mother as well as himself ('all the places **we** have lived in') rather than in Hooper's egotistical terms. There was a tendency for answers in the middle range to digress into other parts of the novel, or to reduce the question to describing Hooper as a bully and Kingshaw as lacking confidence. In such cases, differentiation arose from the extent to which answers were supported from the text and how far such support was analysed.

### Question 18

**How far does Hill show that Charles Kingshaw's sense of duty contributes to his death?**

This was markedly less popular than the extract option, and few candidates really identified or explored how Kingshaw's sense of duty was manifest; for example in his behaviour towards Hooper in Hang Wood or his failure to try to escape in London when being fitted for his new school uniform. Some candidates explored a range of factors which contributed to his death, without referencing a sense of duty at all. Others tried – inevitably unsuccessfully – to answer the question using only the **question 17** extract.

### Question 19

**How does Stevenson make this first meeting between Mr Utterson and Mr Hyde so dramatic?**

This was another very popular text and question, and again, for the most part, reasonably answered with a pleasing number of candidates attempting to engage with the 'How' of the question by exploring Stevenson's writing in some detail. There was some effective examination of the way Hyde was presented, and some telling comment on the force of the dialogue, often effectively illustrated. Some weaker answers merely paraphrased the extract, but these were in the minority.

### Question 20

**In what ways does Stevenson memorably depict the conflict between good and evil in the novel?**

As with Susan Hill, this was both less popular and less well done than the extract option. Most focused on the dual personality, sometimes demonstrating good knowledge of the socio-historical context in which the novel was written. However, the question directed candidates to consider Stevenson's writing ('memorably depict'), and very few candidates moved beyond comments on Jekyll and Hyde to consider how Stevenson presents them. This was another question where too many candidates attempted to answer using only the extract printed on the examination paper, and as always this was self-limiting.

### Question 21

**How does Fitzgerald make this account of events at the time of the birth of Tanner's daughters so memorable?**

This was the most popular question in the Prose section of the paper. A wide range of answers was seen, from basic re-telling of some of the events covered, to some sensitive and informed engagement with Fitzgerald's writing showing good understanding of the humour in the narrative. It was evident that many candidates had enjoyed studying the story, and responded with relish. There was some very good analysis of the contribution Brinkman makes to the story, and the imagery of butchery and the slaughterhouse figured prominently in stronger answers. The irony of 'Throw Nothing Away' was widely appreciated. There was much to comment on in the extract, and examiners did not require exhaustive coverage of every aspect for high reward. However, it was surprising that candidates could write about this extract, as some did, with no reference to the discarded twin. Some candidates confused Brinkman with the doctor. There were some candidates who wrote about how difficult life was in rural New Zealand (or in some cases, Australia), or focused on why the events would be memorable for the characters themselves.

### Question 22

**Explore the ways in which Ted Hughes makes nature such a powerful force in *The Rain Horse*.**

Although markedly less popular than the question on *At Hiruharama*, such is the take-up for the short story anthology that there were plenty of answers seen. Most candidates found something useful to say about the ways in which nature is presented in the story. Weaker answers tended to concentrate on the weather, sometimes with passing reference to the horse. Some offered an idea of the story as a return of a repressed memory (unspecified), with little or no reference to nature. Stronger answers remembered that people, too, are part of nature. However, there were very few answers which explored how *the writing* makes nature such a powerful force.



# LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

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## Key Messages

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And most significantly:

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## General Comments

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The topping and tailing of essays with general comment is not to the candidate's advantage. Lengthy 'courtesy' introductions setting out what the candidate will do and 'conclusions' which merely re-state points already made (sometimes at inordinate length) have this in common: they reduce the time available to the candidate for the close exploration of how writers achieve their effects. By contrast, succinct introductions which get to grips straight away with the key words of the question enable candidates to focus from the start.

## **Comments on Specific Questions**

### **Section A: Poetry**

#### **THOMAS HARDY: from *Selected Poems***

**Question 1** Explore the ways in which Hardy creates strong feelings of loneliness in both *The Darkling Thrush* and *Drummer Hodge*.

This was perhaps the most striking example on the paper of candidates ignoring the key words of the question and merely rehearsing everything that they had been taught about the poems, including some spurious points about the effect of the death of Hardy's wife. The two poems are quite substantial and candidates were not expected to cover absolutely everything in them, so it was particularly important for them to select relevantly and to structure their answers carefully. Many candidates effectively wrote two separate essays, leaving themselves little time for their second question. In responses to *The Darkling Thrush* they wrote copiously and generally well on the coldness of the atmosphere, the end of the year and the deathly imagery, but without making the connection to feelings of loneliness. Those who picked out the solitariness of the poet, the fact that everyone else had 'sought their household fires', and the single thrush immediately elevated their answers from a general 'run-through'. Generally answers fared better with *Drummer Hodge* and were sometimes able to argue the loneliness of the situation Hodge encountered, and the pathos of his death and burial far from loved ones in an alien environment. Good answers were able to select and analyse appropriate quotation to help argue their view. Strong candidates were able to



seamlessly integrate textual illustration into responses in sensible / perceptively focussed 'bite sized' amounts. Weaker answers contained the usual biographical and historical information within, often, lengthy explanations.

**Question 2** Explore the ways in which Hardy creates such a sad picture in *No Buyers: A Street Scene*.

This was an almost equally popular question and most candidates were able to make at least some response to its sadness. There were some very thorough explanations of the situation, and the parallels between the man and his horse were made much of as was the separation of the man and his wife. Detailed comment on the language (for example, "Dirge-like" and "funeral train") was needed to lift answers beyond narrative, however.

### **Poems Deep and Dangerous**

**Question 3** In what ways does Armitage memorably portray the speaker's feeling in *In Our Tenth Year*?

This was not a particularly popular option, but those candidates who did attempt it usually showed a high degree of engagement and there were a few very sensitive readings which explored the image of the harebell, the idea of the watercolour and the way in which the relationship has changed over time. There were assertions about affairs and strain, rather than an understanding of the idea that relationships change and become stronger over time. There was also confusion about the imagery – some candidates assumed that 'let it go' meant that the relationship should be let go. Unfortunately there were also some answers which showed very little understanding and which appeared to have treated the poem as an Unseen – never a wise approach.

**Question 4** How does Jennings movingly convey her feelings about her parents to you in *One Flesh*?

This was the more popular option on this text and candidates perhaps found the poem more accessible. They generally showed a satisfactory understanding of the content but could have focused much more strongly on the viewpoint: 'her feelings about her parents'. 'Movingly' was ignored by all but the most successful candidates, which of course meant that the qualities of the language and imagery were not given due attention. Very few mentioned the images of the thread and the feather, or saw the implications of age and death in the poem. Too often there was a general explanation of the poem and the implication or assertion of divorce or separation. There seemed little understanding at times of how relationships change and can become companionable. Very few touched the depths of the poem and the ambiguity of feeling expressed by the poet.

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

**Question 5** How does Brewster vividly convey a sense of different places in *Where I Come From*.

A popular poetry text and a popular question, which produced a wide range of response quality. The question invited comparison of 'different places', yet many candidates simply explained what they thought was happening in the city and then outlined what they thought was the poet's position on the country. They described the first stanza then described the second stanza, and there was little focus on poetic language and effects. Better candidates got to the heart of the poem and the question by making a workmanlike comparison between the presentation of the city and the presentation of the countryside in the poem. The more analysis of the language they offered and the more thoroughly pointed the contrasting of the pictures was, the more successful their responses.

**Question 6** Explore the ways in which Halligan uses words and images vividly in *The Cockroach*.

It was quite rare to find a candidate who actually answered what was asked on this poem. Most candidates were clear that the poet compared himself with a cockroach, and some commented on the extended nature of the comparison, but very few discussed how words and images gained their effects and were used vividly. Those few who did this, or even made a fair attempt at doing this, were able to produce relevant material rather than the basic explanation and assertion that constituted most of the responses seen. Too often there was a listing of individual words without any attempt to explore their poetic effect. Often there was an effort to see the poem as a sort of Seven Ages of Cockroach/Man, usually asserted without sufficient textual support. Such an approach did not really engage with the terms of the question and proved self-penalising. The poetic effect most commonly discussed here was 'personification' and this was identified in two ways: the movements of the Cockroach were personification because humans move like that; the fact that the Cockroach was a 'he' was personification because male humans are identified as 'he'.

## **Section B: Poetry**

### **JANE AUSTEN: *Northanger Abbey***

**Question 7** In what ways does Austen make this such a revealing and significant moment in the novel?

This text was offered by only a few Centres, but it had obviously been chosen to suit their candidates and there were some very engaged responses. Most candidates found the passage revealing of the mercenary and duplicitous nature of Isabella, but few found much to say about what is revealed about Catherine. Better answers showed consideration of the significance of the moment and the best explored the language and narrative technique, showing awareness of how Austen lets the characters reveal themselves through their speech.

**Question 8** Who does Austen's writing persuade you is the villain of the novel – and why?

Most answers to this question chose Isabella Thorpe as their 'villain', and many tried to use the passage for **question 7** as part of their justification. There was much narrative in such answers. Better answers offered a definition of 'villain', argued a case, and directed their material appropriately. The most popular choices were General Tilney and John Thorpe, of course. There were some wide-ranging responses that evaluated one character against another and used apt detail from the text to support the argument. Disappointingly few candidates explored how the narrative technique revealed the villainy.

### **TSITSI DANGAREMBGA: *Nervous Conditions***

**Question 9** Explore the ways in which Dangarembga makes this a memorable and significant moment in the novel.

There was a wide range in quality of responses to this question. Although there were many good answers, there were also many in which it seemed that candidates could not resist the temptation to write at length about education, emancipation of women, marriage, racism etc missing the point of the question – how the passage was memorable and significant. Only the most successful answers dealt with both strands. The context was particularly important in assessing the memorable and significant aspects of Maiguru's behaviour in the second half of this extract. Many candidates did respond to the surprising nature of this, but few made enough of its significance. Strong candidates were able to discuss the societal/ political issues revealed by her willingness to speak up at last and to contradict Babamukuru, and by her words about the perception and treatment of women. Additionally, strong candidates were also able to discuss the writing as prose, focussing on characterisation and aspects of the setting. Really perceptive candidates thought, for instance, to comment on "You do!" exclaimed Babamukuru and recovering himself, invited her to continue' or 'Babamukuru cleared his throat. "Er, Tambudzai," he asked tentatively, "do you have anything to say?"' in order to show how Babmukuru is deflated. Tambu's viewpoint was important here too and only the best answers made much comment on it. Engagement with the writing itself is what differentiated the good answers from the competent or basic responses.

**Question 10** To what extent does Dangarembga's writing make you feel that Tambu loses something of value by trying to gain an education?

Better answers were able to argue that Tambu loses part of her cultural identity and family values, though only a handful of answers were illustrated with sufficient close textual reference. Often when illustrating the life and family she was seen to be leaving behind, one was left with the impression that she would have been a fool not to. Hence the argument was not totally convincing. Few candidates argued that she loses nothing of value, but the question was probably best answered with a balanced response to 'to what extent?' and offering a good range of material to be explored.

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

**Question 11** What does Desai's writing make you feel about Mama and Papa at this moment in the novel?

A popular text and a popular question. The question asks for a direct personal response and there was often a surprising lack of focus on the key words 'make you feel about'. There may have been some misreading in that candidates wrote about Mama and Papa's feelings rather than their own. Candidates who began to see Mama and Papa's selfishness, and favouritism of Aruna, their complacency about the way in which Aruna

behaves and their use of Uma as an unpaid servant were on the right track, but too often candidates did not focus fully on Mama and Papa and digressed into discussion of Uma and her general relationship with her parents. In fact, this question often elicited responses which were barely rooted in the passage itself. Very few got down to the necessary level of analysis of the language of the passage to answer the question in real detail. Too many of the responses here were general overviews of the 'Mamapapa' figure of elsewhere in the novel, the result of the inability to focus on the detail of the passage itself mentioned above.

**Question 12** How does Desai's writing make Anamika so memorable and significant in the novel?

Most candidates knew a good deal about Anamika and gave details of this character. Many answers, however, just provided a narrative of her life and did not direct the material fully enough towards the terms of the question. Much was implied, little was explicitly addressed. Better answers focused on the key words of the question: 'memorable' and 'significant', and treated these as separate terms not a sort of composite label. Most of what we learn of her is memorable, but candidates needed to argue this. What made her a significant character was often just reduced to a very general comment on the status of daughters in Indian culture – relevant, of course, but under-explored to the point of becoming almost a 'shorthand' response.

#### **HELEN DUNMORE: *The Siege***

**Question 13** How does Dunmore vividly convey Mikhael's thoughts and feelings to you at this moment in the novel?

This was a less widely studied text than the other prose texts and so it is difficult to make detailed comments on the questions, but the few answers seen did trace through the passage and at least offered some relevantly selected quotations from it. The problem these responses encountered was in answering the question 'how?' and addressing the term 'vividly'. To answer this question candidates really needed to analyse the writing as fully as possible, and few were either willing or able enough to do so. There was also a notable lack of knowledge of the context, so the suspicion arose that many had approached the passage as an 'Unseen'. Hence there were many responses which offered relevant comments, or just began to develop relevant personal response, rather than offering even reasonably developed material. There is some extremely vivid description of Mikhael's physical state, his dream and of the effect of the phosphorous bombs, and these were usually under-explored. Most were able to see some fear within Mikhail's thoughts, though they were unable to show how the language conveyed the intensity of his feelings. The vividness of the dream was overlooked as was the use of power words like fire. The language use of short sentence repetition at the end was not mentioned by anyone.

**Question 14** What does Dunmore's writing make you feel about the way the Russian Government affects the lives of two of the following characters in *The Siege*? Elizaveta Antonovna, Fedya, Marina Petrovna.

There were so few responses to this question that it is not possible to make meaningful comment.

#### **GEORGE ELIOT: *Silas Marner***

**Question 15** In what ways does Eliot make this such a striking and significant moment in the novel?

This was a popular question. Few candidates really knew how to respond to the term 'striking' in this context, though most were comfortable tackling the significance of the moment. Most were able to see it as a turning point in the lives of Godfrey and of Silas, though the implications could have been explored much more fully in most cases: very few indeed were clear on the link between this episode and the time sixteen years later when Godfrey gets round to trying to re-claim Eppie. The 'striking' features were handled poorly because candidates were unable to explore the language of presentation here. It was very rare to find a candidate paying attention to the description of the child, for instance, and the pathos in the writing describing the 'connection' between Eppie and Silas at this moment.

**Question 16** How does Eliot vividly portray Silas's loneliness before Eppie comes into his life?

This question required candidates to analyse well-selected detail from relevant moments early in the text. Unfortunately, very many candidates were only able to offer a general narrative overview of some of some relevant incidents, which led to Silas becoming the reclusive figure he seems to be later in the story. Hence there was some knowledge and understanding evident, but little material which attempted to answer how the 'vivid' portrayal is achieved. Loneliness was asserted, and sometimes convincingly argued, but the 'how' of the question was almost always left to the situation Silas is placed in, not explored through the language Eliot employs. A few better answers were able to mention the striking image of the spider, and made some

elaboration on Silas's relationship with his gold, for instance, but these were the exception. There were surprisingly few allusions to the way in which the villagers treat him with suspicion largely because of his cataleptic moments. Quite a number ran out of material very quickly and moved on to describe Silas's life with Eppie.

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

**Question 17** How does Hill's writing make you feel at this moment in the novel?

Some candidates did not read this question carefully enough and tried to offer feelings that the characters experienced in the passage. Generally, however, candidates responded to the question set, though feelings were often very general, and sometimes opinions rather than emotional responses. Good answers looked closely at the passage and responded to the fact that Kingshaw was, in this situation, in the ascendancy; seemingly feeling free and more in control. Hooper was, by comparison, more fearful and less comfortable – a matter of much rejoicing for the majority of readers. What distinguished good answers was the range of material that was considered, the response to Kingshaw's moments of comparative dominance, and – often – the comparison between this and similar moments in *Hang Wood*. Best answers were always willing to explore the language of the passage in presenting this episode.

**Question 18** How does Hill's writing powerfully show that Kingshaw is an easy target for Hooper's tormenting?

This question invites an analysis of Kingshaw's character, but too often candidates focused on Hooper instead of Kingshaw. Candidates seemed to find it difficult to home in on the wealth of material which illustrates Kingshaw's sensitivity and susceptibility to bullying, and instead focused on Hooper's dominance. Answers were not properly focused on the idea of an 'easy target', and this limited the effectiveness of response to the terms of the question set. Once again there were quite a few instances of candidates attempting to answer this question using the passage connected with **question 17**, and this made it almost impossible for them to do themselves justice on this question.

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

**Question 19** How does Stevenson make this moment in the novel so tense?

Candidates often handled this question well. A good answer needed to focus on the language of the passage, and many candidates got off to a good start by examining the normally quiet Poole's exclamation in the first line of the extract. Close analysis of the passage characterised all of the better answers to this question, and the more detail and intelligent inferences that were made from the exploration of this the more effective the answers became. Weaker answers confined themselves largely to the situation described, but even these sometimes referred to the nervousness and anxiety of the characters here, and sometimes to the language which made this obvious. Weakest answers tended just to re-tell the extract and imply that it was tense from the description of the action.

**Question 20** Explore one moment in the novel where Stevenson's writing makes you feel particularly shocked.

This was a much less popular question on this text, and candidates who offered it often struggled to supply sufficient detail of the 'moment' they selected. They usually merely re-told an incident saying they were shocked by it, without tackling why this was the case. What, in effect, was missing was the 'exploration' of the incident that the question demands. A few good answers looked very closely at the way their chosen moment was presented by Stevenson.

### **from *Stories of Ourselves***

**Question 21** How does Lurie make the narrator such a likeable character here? (*My Greatest Ambition*)

Quite a number of candidates answered this question, and many found the narrator amusing rather than likeable. Clearly there is some overlap here, but more careful direction of the material they chose would have improved their responses and enabled them to develop them much more thoroughly. Very few answers considered the tone of the passage – the voice of the narrator – and this had a slightly limiting effect on the overall quality of response. Generally, however, most candidates were able to find something to respond to in this character, though the narrow range of quoted detail was often a discriminating factor in their ability to develop relevant responses. A few weak answers merely re-told or paraphrased the passage.

**Question 22** Explore the ways in which Graham Greene makes the story *The Destructors* both disturbing and amusing for you.

Candidates answering this question found it difficult to respond convincingly to the 'amusing' nature of the story, and though almost universally those answering claimed they found it both disturbing and amusing, they never really managed to show what was amusing and why they found it so. Most were able to find the systematic destruction of a listed building by a bunch of young children quite disturbing, though efforts to show why they were doing this often took over the entire answer and psychology was often asserted totally without argument. It was all to do with the war which had just ended. Fair knowledge of the story was frequently displayed, and some relevant detail was often included, but few answers were able to offer much of a response to the way Greene presents the story which itself is key to making it both amusing and disturbing.

# LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

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**Paper 0486/13**  
**Poetry and Prose 13**

## Key Messages

In order to do well in this subject, candidates should be discouraged from:

- writing long introductions explaining what they are going to do, or summarising the whole of their answer in advance
- writing long conclusions repeating what has already been said
- giving a great deal of unneeded biographical information
- commenting on how the use of commas and colons adds to the mood and tone of a poem
- commenting on rhyme schemes and verse forms without relating them to the question
- using the passage in the passage-based questions to answer the discursive question on a text
- over-reliance on using terminology rather than focusing on explaining the effect of the language.

And most significantly:

- treating a poem or passage as an Unseen exercise.

Success will come from:

- a relevant and carefully argued response to the question
- detailed knowledge supporting the points made
- careful commentary on the writer's choice of words and on the effects created
- an individual and perceptive personal response.

## General Comments

This was the first November session for the new specification with the two question format. There were very few rubric errors and very few examples of rushed or incomplete final answers. There were a few examples of candidates answering more than the requisite number of questions, but this seemed to be less prevalent than in previous years. There was no change to the style of the questions but all the poems were printed on the paper, which candidates obviously found of benefit.

In the prose section, the most radical change was that this was a closed book examination. For a long time the passage-based questions have been significantly more popular than the discursive ones, and there was no change to this. Those candidates who did attempt the general questions often achieved good marks because of the quality of their engagement with the text and the persuasiveness of their arguments, though they were often over-reliant on generalisations and could have benefited from even just a little more specific reference. There are still too many examples of essay questions being answered by candidates exclusively using the material in the passage of the question before on the same text. Candidates need to be reminded that the passage is principally relevant only to the question which is asked on it; using it as the basis of an answer to the second question on the text in question is always going to be, at best, self-limiting and in some cases completely irrelevant.

There was much admirable work from all parts of the world and it is a constant pleasure to read the scripts of candidates who clearly love the subject and engage with their set texts. The best answers were full of well supported personal responses to the questions set, and showed sensitivity to the writers' methods and intentions.

When candidates performed less well, it was usually because they had not adhered closely enough to the terms of the question. Candidates still do not spend enough time on identifying the key words of the question and tailoring their knowledge and understanding to these words. In fact, many of them do not appear to plan



their answers before embarking on them. More successful responses make relevant selections from extracts and poems in answering the question, rather than slavishly working through the text methodically in order. These stronger responses can, as it were, see the wood for the trees and shape more carefully-crafted arguments with pertinent textual support. Their responses keep the question clearly in focus throughout.

In the poetry section many candidates wrote down everything they had been taught about the poem rather than selecting relevant material to form a coherent response to the question. So many times it was obvious that the intensifiers in the question, the words such as 'vividly', 'dramatically', 'memorably', had been ignored because there was no response to the quality of the writing. All questions offer the opportunity to address AO 3 'recognise and appreciate ways in which writers use language, structure and form to create and shape meanings and effects', and without an attempt to engage with the writing answers will not reach the higher Bands. The most successful poetry answers explored the precise effects of words and sounds in poems. A close appreciation was, by contrast, not demonstrated by listing a number of quotations and adding only a general comment that the words are vivid or powerful. Listing key words and labelling them a 'semantic field' is in itself description and not analysis. Literary terms can be useful in making concise reference to aspects of the writing, but they *serve* the analysis and do not constitute the analysis itself. Less successful responses often worked through an extract or a poem logging literary devices in an explanatory fashion: e.g. 'This metaphor means...'; 'The poem has an ababab rhyme scheme...'

Too often candidates included biographical details (particularly with the Hardy poems) in the mistaken belief presumably that these counted as literary comments.

The strongest essays deployed quotation judiciously – that is to say, used only those words actually required to substantiate the point being made and integrated them into own sentences. Excessively long quotations can at best be only inert illustrations of a point, and not an opportunity for close textual analysis. Some candidates used ellipsis to reduce the length of their quotations – but often in so doing cut out the very words that would most usefully support the point being made.

The topping and tailing of essays with general comment is not to the candidate's advantage. Lengthy 'courtesy' introductions setting out what the candidate will do and 'conclusions' which merely re-state points already made (sometimes at inordinate length) have this in common: they reduce the time available to the candidate for the close exploration of how writers achieve their effects. By contrast, succinct introductions which get to grips straight away with the key words of the question enable candidates to focus from the start.

## **Comments on Specific Questions**

### **SECTION A: POETRY**

#### **THOMAS HARDY: from *Selected Poems***

##### **Question 1**

Most responses to *On the Departure Platform* showed an understanding of the surface aspects of the poem: the departure of the speaker's loved one and his sadness as she walks further and further away from him down the platform. Stronger responses explored the symbolism of the barrier, the effects of the visual descriptions, in particular, the images of darkness and lightness ('but a spot', 'lamplight's fitful glowers', 'nebulous white'). Only the strongest responses considered the sense of vanishing emotionally as well as physically and the nostalgia in 'But never as then'.

The strongest responses to the relatively long poem *The Going* were able to select relevant material judiciously, whereas less successful responses adopted an explanatory approach as they worked their way through the poem stanza by stanza with sometimes scant regard to the actual question. The strongest responses traced the journey of the speaker from his feelings of anger and shock at his loved one's dying to his memories of when they were at their happiest, finishing with his regrets and sense of despair.

##### **Question 2**

The most successful responses engaged sensitively with the ways in Hardy conveys the speaker's loneliness and grief. They explored perceptively the contrast between the present and past, considering the effects of his fond memories of the early days of the relationship. Some candidates wrote eloquently about how moved they were by the use of direct address to the dead partner and the sense of age and feebleness conveyed in the poem's final lines. There was evidence in a number of responses that background

autobiographical material got in the way of fresh and personal responses, with points glossed and asserted rather than the poetry explored.

### ***Poems Deep and Dangerous***

#### **Question 3**

The most successful responses showed a clear engagement with the poem's ideas and explored the striking effects of the imagery Arnold deploys in *To Marguerite*. They were particularly effective in writing about the comparison of humans to islands, and to the image of once united continents being kept apart. They analysed the effects created by the depiction of the sea as having an 'enclasp' and being 'unplumb'd, salt, estranging'. They considered the impact of the fire of longing being cooled as soon as kindled. Less successful responses adopted an explanatory and assertive approach to the supposed meanings of the poem as they worked through line by line, occasionally logging similes and metaphors. The weakest responses offered paraphrase and did not address the question's key words.

#### **Question 4**

The strongest responses conveyed a genuine enjoyment at Mitchell's whimsical tone in capturing the individual and diversity of people. These responses were alert to the final stanza's perhaps surprising assertion, in view of the speaker's detailed description of people, that they elude definition. Most candidates were at least able to explore the effects of the personification of the stomach, the comparison of eyes to birds, the list of scents or the similes relating to taste. Less successful responses worked through the poem explaining features rather than exploring specific effects, which resulted in comment at a surface level only.

### ***Songs of Ourselves: from Part 4***

#### **Question 5**

This was a very popular question. The most successful answers recognised the three distinctive sections of the poem: the appearance and predatory instincts of the pike; the gruesome incident with the captive fish; and the speaker's memory of fishing fifty years earlier. By providing an overview of this kind, these candidates were better able to select relevant material that charted the growing sense of awe and fear as the poem progresses. There was much evidence of close exploration of the effects of particular words such as 'tigering', 'killers', 'malevolent' and 'horror', and candidates enjoyed analysing the more gruesome imagery. Occasional interpretations compared the malevolence of the pike with that of humankind, though these points were sometimes asserted as fact rather than substantiated by close reference to the detail of the poem. The least successful responses worked exhaustively through the poem, summarising content rather than exploring Hughes' poetic techniques in creating feelings of fear. Others chose lines from the poem in a random fashion in responses that lacked coherence. Quite a few responses were unselective and did not get round to exploring material in the later stanzas of the poem.

#### **Question 6**

The strongest responses to this popular question explored the peculiarity of the similes in the first stanza, the lavishness of the language in the second stanza and the extravagance of the instructions given. These responses were alert to the possibility that the poem was open to alternative interpretations. By contrast, a number of responses worked slavishly from biographical knowledge of Rossetti's life, and made each line and image a clue to be solved in relation to a rigid religious interpretation that excluded any other. Indeed, less successful responses tended to gloss, explain and assert rather than explore how Rossetti uses words and images strikingly. Comments sometimes read as regurgitated footnotes to the poem rather than truly personal responses to Rossetti's writing.

### **SECTION B: PROSE**

#### **JANE AUSTEN: *Northanger Abbey***

#### **Question 7**

Examiners did not see many responses to this question. In the ones seen there was generally a sound understanding of how Austen reveals Catherine's innocence and sense of morality, and Henry's tactful kindness in dealing with Catherine's close questioning and not revealing his true opinion of Isabella, whilst being as honest as he can in the circumstances. Whereas some saw Henry's solicitousness, others saw

condescension. Candidates would have benefitted from making better use of the dialogue in the passage to substantiate their points with greater analysis of the language, thereby noting Austen's use of irony.

#### Question 8

There were too few responses to make worthwhile comment.

#### TSITSI DANGAREMBGA: *Nervous Conditions*

#### Question 9

Most responses demonstrated an awareness of the context of the extract, namely that the women, who were not present at the start of the *dare*, have just interrupted proceedings. Most found Takesure's fecklessness and cowardice a source of entertainment, expressing the view that he damages his case by exaggerating Lucia's powers. The latter's partly-suppressed amusement was also found entertaining. The most successful responses commented on how the details of the extract revealed the unequal relationship between the sexes, exploring in particular the interchange between Maiguru and Babamukuru. Her obedience, albeit reluctantly given, is bound up with Babamukuru's concern with how others might perceive his ability to control his wife. This is especially poignant as he is there to preside over a meeting about an 'immodest woman' who will not do as she is told. Essays were most convincing where they related ideas about patriarchy to the specific details found in the extract.

#### Question 10

There were only a few responses to this question. Responses made reference to Chido's attempts to mediate between Nyasha and their father, with specific mention of the events during and after the dance when Nyasha and her father come to blows. Only the strongest of these responses explored in detail the extent to which Dangarembga's writing portrayed Chido as a loveable character.

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

#### Question 11

There were many successful responses which addressed the question's key word 'disturbing' directly, by exploring what the extract reveals about Anamika and her unhappy marriage to an ugly, insufferably arrogant bridegroom who was not appreciative of her looks, intelligence and kind nature. Candidates' greatest fury was reserved for the mother-in-law who kept Anamika as little more than a servant dining on whatever was scoured from the pans she cooked with. There was genuine sadness that this match was made for mercenary reasons, and not for love, and anger that a suspicious death goes unremarked because it takes place within the family behind closed doors and concerns a woman. Less successful responses were those which were a paraphrase of the passage, and also moved on to discuss events outside the passage at the expense of analysing what was before them.

#### Question 12

The strongest responses explored the detail of Desai's portrayal of Arun in the United States: a portrait of a young man out of his element and temperamentally unsuited to life with the USA. He is bewildered by its customs and the emphasis on consumption; depicted in different ways in relation to the different members of the Patton family, who have various 'issues' with food. Some referred to Mr Patton's derisive words about Arun's vegetarianism. Some stronger responses linked Arun's crippling withdrawn behaviour and lack of emotional development to his upbringing under the relentless pressure from his father.

#### HELEN DUNMORE: *The Siege*

#### Question 13

The most successful responses pointed out how this extract from a story by Mikhail relatively early in the novel prepares us for the depiction of the devastating effects of hunger and winter on the people of Leningrad later in the novel. The most successful responses sustained critical analysis of the writing, in particular the personification of the boastful General Hunger and his powerful descriptions of the physical and mental effects of hunger on young and old. The tone of the extract is disturbing in its sheer lack of humanity. These strong responses explored in detail the effects of the use of repetition and similes characteristic of the fairy tale genre. Less successful responses tended to explain rather than explore the

effects of language features. The least successful responses showed only a rudimentary grasp of the content, sometimes offering a literal interpretation of General Hunger, which gave the impression of the extract being read as an unseen text.

#### Question 14

There were a few responses to this question which took the line that the women in the novel were more admirable than the men. Contrast was made between Anna and her father: the former selfless, tenacious and able to work for survival; the latter self-centred and needing others to help him survive. Some stronger responses made a powerful case for the increasingly admirable qualities of Marina as the novel progresses.

#### GEORGE ELIOT: *Silas Marner*

#### Question 15

Most responses were able to offer overviews of the content of the extract, a turning-point in the novel, which movingly reveals the contrast between the introverted and selfish old Silas and the outgoing and generous-hearted new Silas. The strongest responses selected references from the extract judiciously in order to support their argument, whereas less successful responses tended to work through the passage exhaustively, explaining the content. The most successful responses explored Eliot's use of natural imagery, the comparisons made between Eppie and gold, and Eppie's role in leading Eppie back into the community and religion. Better answers recognised the choice of natural, colourful and vibrant images in the second paragraph as a direct counterbalance to the darkness, both physical and metaphorical, in which he had lived for so many years. Weaker responses lacked detailed reference to the passage and critical analysis of Eliot's use of language.

#### Question 16

There were too few responses to this question to make worthwhile comment.

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

#### Question 17

Stronger responses referred to the gothic elements in the writing with its initial short, urgent sentences and the establishment of a hostile setting. In addition, many recognised the power of the narrative stance in enabling the terror felt by Kingshaw to transfer directly to the reader. There was detailed exploration of the effects of the unexplained noises in the dark and Kingshaw's immobility when he puts the light on. Most responses grasped the immediate context that Hooper has witnessed Kingshaw's terror at the attack by the crow, and is using this to torment him by placing a stuffed crow on his bed. Some answers sacrificed the opportunity to examine language in close detail in favour of writing more generally about the foreshadowing aspects of the passage, with the specific incident placed into a sequence of events leading up to Kingshaw's suicide. In addition, some weaker answers focused on only few select paragraphs, thereby sacrificing the opportunity to show understanding of a developing narrative.

#### Question 18

Most responses condemned both Mr Hooper and Mrs Kingshaw for their selfish inability to appreciate what is going on between the boys. Some admired Mr Hooper to an extent for his willingness to take on the care and upkeep of an eleven-year-old boy, and for an apparent desire to do the right thing. But this admiration quickly evaporated with the slap he gives Kingshaw. Mrs Kingshaw was generally regarded as without any merit, many seeing a mother ruled only by her self-interest and having no motherly instincts towards her son. Some responses offered Mrs Fielding as a model mother in comparison with Mrs Kingshaw.

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

#### Question 19

The most successful responses commented on the insincerity of Jekyll's appeal to Lanyon's friendship, and referred to the manipulative nature of this and other aspects of the letter. These stronger answers recognised the effect that his grovelling had upon the reader's perception of Jekyll as a character and grasped the full extent of his diminished stature. Most responses showed a sound understanding of Jekyll's insistence on the

urgency of the mission and its timing; they explored the use of listing, imperatives, repetition and the detail of the instructions in conveying Jekyll's overwhelming desperation.

### Question 20

The strongest responses explored in some detail the dramatic stages of the plot: Poole's arrival at Utterson's; the servants' behaviour on their arrival at Jekyll's; the slow build-up to the breaking down of the door; Hyde's suicide; the search for Jekyll and failure to find him; and the discovery of the letters. Whereas less successful responses covered this territory by describing or explaining the plot, better responses explored the writer at work, responding in detail to the key words of the question: 'Explore the ways in which Stevenson...'. They explored the dramatic action, especially the fetching of the axe, the positioning of the servants and bashing the door down. They considered too the dramatic realisation of both Poole's and Utterson's fears and suspicions, the vivid descriptions of Hyde's behaviour and death, and the implications of what remains unsolved. Some candidates limited their performance by using only the extract for **Question 19** as a source for their answer. This misguided approach meant that they covered only a narrow territory and demonstrated little knowledge of the key moment in the novel indicated in **Question 20**.

from *Stories of Ourselves*

### Question 21

The strongest responses engaged perceptively with the detail of Soueif's narrative method, showing a real sympathy for the narrator and what made the extract so moving. They were able to contextualise the extract, noting its position near the beginning of the story and providing some indication of future events in the story. There was much detailed exploration of the juxtaposing of the narrator's past and present life, the intensity of love for the man in the earlier stages of their relationship and her failed efforts to integrate with his society. The strongest responses explored the use of symbolism. Less successful responses tended to describe and explain the content, often without an awareness of what happens elsewhere in the story. Such awareness would be important in any account of what made this particular extract so moving.

### Question 22

Those who chose the son in *The Son's Veto* demonstrated a sound understanding of the son's selfishness in thinking only of his own position in society and provided suitable textual reference for support. The most successful responses recognised the irony of having a Christian minister who is so unkind, cruel and unfeeling to the person who is supposed to be the closest to him in the whole world. Others pointed out his unforgiving stare at Sam at the funeral as evidence of the power of class snobbery which hardens his heart irrevocably and diminishes him as a person. His mother's willingness to accede to his wishes amounts to fear; he has totally destroyed her self-confidence and ruins her life as a result.

*Her First Ball* responses were generally less successful. Leila's wide-eyed innocence and excitement were recognised, though sometimes recounted in an overly narrative fashion without explicit reference to the key words of the question. The strongest responses commented on the ways in which Mansfield depicts the almost dream-like haze through which Leila experiences her arrival at the ball, referring to the fairy-tale elements of the 'waltzing lamp-posts' and the 'satin shoes' which 'chased each other like birds'. Most responses showed a sound understanding of how earth-shattering the encounter with the fat man was for her. Better responses also noted her youthful resilience to the experience and her regained pleasure by the end of the ball which 'became one beautiful flying wheel'.

# LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

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Paper 0486/21

Drama 21

## Key messages

- Most answers would be improved by direct and accurate quotation from the set passage or text as a whole, in order to support the points made.
- Answers which avoid a narrative or descriptive approach and respond to the question are the most successful.
- Successful answers show awareness of the dramatist's methods and intentions.
- A detailed response to the drama genre was a feature of strong answers.
- Some candidates are not paying sufficient attention to the language the writers use. This is preventing a high level of achievement.

## General comments

In answer to the passage-based questions, the simplest route to improvement would be for candidates to use brief, well-integrated direct quotations and then to comment on the effects the dramatist creates. There were many instances this session of candidates referring to five lines of text and leaving the Examiner to decide which of these were relevant. Successful candidates read the question carefully and thought about its implications. They did not use the passage to tell the story of the play or as a peg on which to hang an answer to a question from a previous session.

Answering a question by referring almost solely to stage directions was a prevalent feature this session. Whereas some responses made effective use of the directions as having implications for an actor's interpretation of a role or movement and expression on stage, others wrote as if an audience can read the directions and be affected by them. Such responses often ignored the content and context of the dialogue, where the dramatic impact is inevitably the greatest. Some responses were limited by a description or explanation of the passage rather than an analysis of its impact and effects.

In answer to the discursive questions, candidates would benefit from learning quotations from the play as a whole. Often sound and developed arguments were restricted by lack of close textual reference in support. The strongest responses gave a clear line of argument, used a wide range of material and avoided using the passage in the previous question and re-telling the narrative. There were a few responses this session where candidates thought the discursive question related to the passage question. Candidates need to be clear that the two are entirely separate.

Responses which paid attention to key terms in the question, such as: 'strikingly... memorably... powerfully... entertaining', and considered the language, action and interaction in the drama achieved the best results.

The most useful introductions were those which focused attention immediately on the question and avoided lengthy context-setting, or giving historical background information. The time spent writing conclusions which merely re-iterated points already made could have been better used to give a wider range of ideas or more detailed analysis.

There were few rubric infringements on Paper 21 this session. There is still a need, however, for candidates to number their questions correctly. Some write no number at all, and some write two numbers for one question. Candidates should be reminded to spend the same amount of time on each question on Paper 21. The strongest issue with examination technique stemmed from a lack of focus on the question set.



## **Comments on Specific Questions**

### **Section A DRAMA**

#### **ARTHUR MILLER: *All My Sons***

##### **Question 1**

This was a very popular text and question. Most candidates understood the increasing tension between Keller and Chris and some of the reasons for it, including: Ann's visit and Chris and Ann's marriage plans, the telephone call from George after his visit to see their father, and the significance of what he has learned. The most successful answers responded to both 'dramatic' and 'significant' focusing on the stage directions showing Keller's uneasiness and Chris's emotions, for example, '*hurt*' and '*angry*', and his suspicions after Keller's exaggerated protestations that '*there's nothing wrong with that money*'. They were aware of the parallel conversations and the 'pauses' to indicate George's answers, which the audience can only imagine, but with strong clues from Keller's behaviour and suspicions about Ann and George. The dramatic effects of the conversations and the way they affect pace, mood and tone were understood. The strongest answers also used the whole passage and avoided re-telling too much of the play before this scene.

Less successful answers spent too much time contextualising the passage, re-telling the story of the cracked cylinder heads and Kate's failure to accept Larry's death as an obstacle to Chris and Ann's marriage. They also focused on stage directions and punctuation rather than what was actually happening in the passage.

##### **Question 2**

Successful answers described the changes in the relationship between Keller and Chris at the beginning of the play, and traced it through the play. Comments were supported with apt quotation to show how Chris gradually becomes uneasy at his father's attitude to money, then suspecting him of wrongdoing and finally after the reading of Larry's letter, becoming disgusted with his father's behaviour – wanting him to accept his just, if somewhat belated, punishment. They took into account the way Chris feels overshadowed by Larry and that the father-son relationship is difficult, but were able to demonstrate that there is love and respect between them. Keller's desire to provide for his family, and Chris's future with the business, as a motive for sending the cracked cylinders was also explored. Different views of Keller's suicide emerged with some arguing that he could not face the shame of going to jail and having failed his family, whilst some argued that he deliberately killed himself to give Chris the opportunity to start his life without the stain of Keller's guilt. The best responses supported their view with close reference to the text.

Weaker responses discussed the relationship at the end rather than exploring it throughout the play, or wrote character studies losing focus on the question and what was 'memorable' about their relationship. These also failed to support their answer with textual reference, tending to narrate the story behind the conflict. Some candidates only used information from the passage meaning their evaluation of the relationship was limited.

#### **J.B. PRIESTLEY: *An Inspector Calls***

##### **Question 3**

This was a popular choice of text and question. Successful answers quickly established the context and moved on to explore how Mrs Birling's sense of moral, financial and social superiority are brought into question by the end of this passage. The best responses linked Mrs Birling's impertinent responses, her defiant silence and final powerlessness in being implicated in the death of Eva Smith, to the systematic methods of interrogation by the Inspector. The dramatic tension created was a key feature of these responses with some close analysis of the stage directions, for example, the reference to '*bewildered and frightened glances*' at the Inspector's insistence that he needs Eric and will find him if he does not return. The Inspector's methods; abrupt, precise questions to which he already knew the answers, coupled with his authority, and refusal to be cowed by Mrs Birling all create dramatic tension. The way Mrs Birling interacts with the Inspector, comparing their tones, manners and exchanges were detailed and supported by textual references, showing awareness of the audience and their expectations. Revealing aspects were also explored such as: Sheila siding with the Inspector, encouraging her mother to tell the truth, Mr Birling supporting his wife, and Eric being next to be interrogated with clear hints of the reasons for this in the reference to Eva's pregnancy and her calling herself 'Mrs Birling'.

Less successful responses re-told the passage, or play, focusing just on Mrs Birling or events leading to this moment, failing to notice the shift of power in this scene. They saw her simply as a very arrogant person, who used her power to influence the Committee's decision against Eva. Weaker candidates also misinterpreted Mrs Birling's reaction, and thought she succumbed and admitted her guilt.

#### Question 4

This was not a popular question, but produced some passionate personal responses to Sheila and whether or not the writer makes it possible to sympathise with her or not for the part she played in the suicide of Eva Smith. Successful responses gave a comprehensive account of Sheila with a wide range of references and insights into the whole text, tracing the way she changes and why. Growing sympathy was shown for Sheila as the play progresses, with exploration of her remorse, guilt and maturity towards the end: she is truly sorry and tries to make her parents understand; returning the ring to Gerald indicates her moral growth and more perceptive candidates made wider comments about her significance as the voice of reason and hope, in contrast to the older generation.

Less successful responses gave a character sketch, tended to be simplistic or generalised in comments about Sheila and did not answer the question – whether they felt sympathy for her and why.

#### **WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *The Merchant of Venice***

#### Question 5

This was a popular question and it was helpful for candidates to briefly identify the context of the passage. Most candidates were able to show awareness of the audience by identifying dramatic irony - Portia in disguise, defending Antonio, apparently being on Shylock's side (though few could see her reasoning for doing this) to set the trap for Shylock and ultimately save Antonio's life. The most successful responses addressed the 'powerful' and 'memorable' aspects of the question as two separate (but linked) elements and explored the passage in full, engaging with the situation and the language of the scene. Comments were made about Shylock's hyperbole and how his character is portrayed, whilst also considering the subtext of Antonio's farewell speech. Analysis of this speech, especially, '*Say how I lov'd you*' was given as evidence of his love for Bassanio and readiness to give his life for him. A few candidates lost focus here and embarked on an exploration of their relationship, but the best were able to appreciate that the humour in Bassanio and Gratiano's willingness to sacrifice their wives, unaware of their presence, to save Antonio was used to break the tension. Shylock's praise of Portia and her desire to proceed with the ruling, his insistence on the terms of the bond and the rising tension, were also explored with some close detail to the writing.

Less successful responses re-told the plot or passage and lost focus on the question, berating Shylock for his hatred of Antonio and Christians here, and elsewhere, in the play. Some identified features such as irony but without looking in detail at the text, or considering its significance and impact on the audience.

#### Question 6

A much less popular question. Responses were not always focused on the terms of the question. A common misunderstanding was to explore whether Portia deserves Bassanio. The most successful responses were able to address the 'how far' by carefully considering at what stage Bassanio does, or does not, deserve Portia: exploration of his need of money to finance his lifestyle, his borrowing of money to appear a more worthy, wealthy suitor, being the cause of Antonio's possible death and the fact that he is 'tricking' Portia, indicated that he did not deserve her. However, his ability to choose the correct casket, his obvious love for Portia (and her love for him) as well as his attempts to save Antonio, showing him to be a good friend, made him deserving of her. These responses were supported by some response to Shakespeare's writing, and some relevant words or phrases to support comments. A few perceptive comments were made on Portia's father's good sense in using the caskets to sift out a suitable husband for his daughter: by choosing the correct casket Bassanio clearly deserved her. There was some well-chosen detail to support responses.

Weaker responses narrated the plot involving Bassanio, often with the casket-choosing scene at length but without linking the detail to the question.

**WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *A Midsummer Night's Dream***

**Question 7**

Too few answers were submitted to make comment appropriate.

**Question 8**

Too few answers were submitted to make comment appropriate.

**WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *The Tempest***

**Question 9**

This was quite popular and the focus on 'memorable' addressed in some way: some candidates explored the visual humour of the moment, saw Caliban's fear of Prospero's magical powers and saw the more serious intent expressed by Stephano to make use of Caliban, supporting comments with apt textual detail and quotation. The significance of the moment where the conspiracy against Prospero is set up here was also explored. The most successful responses recognised that this scene marks a shift in tone of the play with the introduction of humour, and visual comedy, and explored how Shakespeare's presentation of Caliban has changed the audience's impressions of him from a villain, to a tormented and badly treated servant, for whom much sympathy may be felt at this point. Exploration of the language was also a feature of these responses.

Less successful responses re-told the passage and plot, lacking focus on what was 'memorable'. There was some misunderstanding of the moment and comic effects created, indicating limited knowledge of the play.

**Question 10**

This was a less popular question. Most candidates focused immediately on comparing Prospero's treatment of Caliban and Ariel, and were able to balance their arguments with references from across the text that showed Prospero clearly acting as a 'cruel master'. The best responses focused on the full terms of the question, 'To what extent', highlighting his differing treatment of them, and acknowledging the audience's understanding of why Prospero behaved as he did; for example, Caliban's attempted rape of Miranda and justifying his delay in freeing Ariel in his pursuit of justice and reconciliation. Prospero's initial treatment of Caliban was also used to justify his later, cruel treatment. More perceptive responses used examples of his friendship with Ariel and argued how the audience were aware that Prospero would ultimately maintain his promise to Ariel. Some also explored his treatment of Ferdinand, and were able to justify this with relevant references and understanding of Prospero's intentions and protectiveness of Miranda.

Less successful responses narrated Prospero's relationship with Ariel and/or Caliban focusing on 'master' or 'cruel' rather than 'cruel master'. This also led to some re-telling of his relationship with all characters due to his cruelty in bringing about the initial storm. A closer reading of the question was required.

**OSCAR WILDE: *The Importance of Being Earnest***

**Question 11**

This was a very popular text, and question, with much to explore in the passage. It was pleasing to see such genuine engagement with the text and question. The key word 'entertaining' allowed for various interpretations, including the definition of 'drama' and how the writer engages the audience but predominantly, it helped candidates to focus on the humorous aspects of the passage. Some knowledge of the context was useful, with Jack's determination to keep Algernon from Cecily and his '*melancholy manner*' and dress, having previously announced the death of his 'brother', were understood by most candidates. The best responses conveyed this briefly, moving through the passage in detail, exploring the irony, confusions, dramatic irony and word-play in the language. They were able to identify the absurdity of the scene: Cecily's naivety, the tension between Jack and Algernon and the way Miss Prism reacts to the news that Ernest is still alive. Engagement with the action and dialogue of the passage was also a feature of these responses and rather than explaining or justifying characters' motivations, the trivialities in the dialogue were explored, linking these to farcical humour used to mock the upper classes. The fact that the audience are aware of everything, Jack's hypocrisy, and the playwright's intent in satirising Victorian morality and excessive concern for appearances over substance were clearly understood.

There was a tendency for weaker candidates to write about the Victorians, providing social and historical background, without consideration of the terms of the question or the passage. There was too much re-telling of the plot in these responses, confusion about the situation here and about the play in general.

**Question 12**

Too few answers were submitted to make comment appropriate.

# LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

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Paper 0486/22

Drama 22

## Key messages

- Most answers would be improved by direct and accurate quotation from the set passage or text as a whole, in order to support the points made.
- Answers which avoid a narrative or descriptive approach and respond to the question are the most successful.
- Successful answers show awareness of the dramatist's methods and intentions.
- A detailed response to the drama genre was a feature of strong answers.
- Some candidates are not paying sufficient attention to the language the writers use. This is preventing a high level of achievement.

## General comments

In answer to the passage-based questions, the simplest route to improvement would be for candidates to use brief, well-integrated direct quotations and then to comment on the effects the dramatist creates. There were many instances this session of candidates referring to five lines of text and leaving the Examiner to decide which of these were relevant. Successful candidates read the question carefully and thought about its implications. They did not use the passage to tell the story of the play or as a peg on which to hang an answer to a question from a previous session.

Answering a question by referring almost solely to stage directions was a prevalent feature this session. Whereas some responses made effective use of the directions as having implications for an actor's interpretation of a role or movement and expression on stage, others wrote as if an audience can read the directions and be affected by them. Such responses often ignored the content and context of the dialogue, where the dramatic impact is inevitably the greatest. Some responses were limited by a description or explanation of the passage rather than an analysis of its impact and effects.

In answer to the discursive questions, candidates would benefit from learning quotations from the play as a whole. Often sound and developed arguments were restricted by lack of close textual reference in support.

The strongest responses gave a clear line of argument, used a wide range of material, avoided using the passage in the previous question and refrained from re-telling the narrative. There were a few responses this session where candidates thought the discursive question related to the passage question. Candidates need to be clear that the two are entirely separate.

Responses which paid attention to key terms in the question, such as: 'strikingly... memorably... powerfully... entertaining', and considered the language, action and interaction in the drama achieved the best results.

The most useful introductions were those which focused attention immediately on the question and avoided lengthy context-setting, or giving historical background information. The time spent writing conclusions which merely re-iterated points already made could have been better used to give a wider range of ideas or more detailed analysis.

There were fewer rubric infringements on Paper 22 this session. There is still a need, however, on both papers for candidates to number their questions correctly. Some write no number at all, some write two numbers for one question. Candidates should also be reminded to spend the same amount of time on each

question on Paper 22. The strongest issue with examination technique stemmed from a lack of focus on the question set.

### **Comments on Specific Questions**

#### **Section A DRAMA**

#### **ARTHUR MILLER: *All My Sons***

##### **Question 1**

This was answered well when candidates commented on it as an 'introduction' to Kate and analysed 'striking' features such as her insistence that Larry is alive, her defensiveness over Ann's arrival, and the vividness and emotional power of her nightmare. Strong answers placed themselves in the position of an audience who have partial knowledge at this stage of the play and, therefore, find it odd that Kate is pleased at the memorial tree falling down. They then commented on how the seeds of the drama as a whole are sown for the audience in this passage. Less effective answers explained the scene and its retrospective context.

##### **Question 2**

This question was answered most successfully when candidates explored the impact of the relationship between Steve and George Deever on George himself, and subsequently on the play as a whole. Many answers were merely explanatory or narrative. The best looked at the powerful impact George's meeting with his father has had, as shown in the confrontation between George and the Keller family. There was also an exploration of the contrasting paths the George/Steve: Joe/Chris relationships take in the play and the themes of guilt, betrayal and justice embodied in this relationship. Weaker answers confused Steve and George.

#### **J.B. PRIESTLEY: *An Inspector Calls***

##### **Question 3**

Many candidates showed a sophisticated awareness of Priestley's aims, and of the political ideas in the play. Some expressed these more effectively than others. Strong answers to this question selected the dramatic effects such as the Inspector's taking control, the power of his presence and language and the generational conflict which ensues on his departure. The dramatic effectiveness of his final speech, with attention to its imagery, featured in such answers but was ignored in less focused responses. Less successful approaches described the events or featured misconceptions, such as Eric not being regretful and Birling offering a bribe to the Inspector.

##### **Question 4**

Approaches to this question were varied, with some looking at Eva's portrayal via her encounters with the Birlings and Gerald and their descriptions of her. Others looked at how Priestley makes her the Centre of attention and a symbolic representative of the oppressed working class, her non-appearance made effective by the supernatural intervention of the Inspector championing her cause. These approaches gave candidates more scope than one which narrated the other characters' involvement with her, without saying much about Eva herself or considering Priestley's artistic decisions.

#### **WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *The Merchant of Venice***

##### **Question 5**

There were a wide range of responses to this question, and a tendency to use the passage as a consideration of Shylock as victim or villain in the play as a whole. Those who avoided repeating inappropriately a question from a previous session fared better. The best answers understood that the question asks about the candidate's mixed feelings, not Shylock's, remembered that this is the audience's first encounter with him, scrutinised the passage carefully, understood that Shylock qualifies 'good man' to mean financially 'sufficient', and could see that his accepting a risky deal hints at an ulterior motive, amplified by his asides and comments on eating with Christians. There were effective, sophisticated and exploratory readings but also answers which narrated subsequent events, wrote extensively about the 'pound of flesh', which occurs after the passage, and ignored the question altogether.



### Question 6

The strongest responses ranged widely across the various examples of 'false appearances' in the play and looked at their significance, rather than merely observing them. Discrimination sprang from the convincing nature of the argument and the candidates' ability to provide precise evidence. Some took this as an opportunity to write about Shylock as victim and Antonio as villain, which though valid and ably executed by some, often tended to cover familiar ground without really engaging with the appearance/reality theme. There were some surprising misunderstandings of 'false appearances' as meaning minor characters, and some candidates retold the events of the casket choosing without relating this to the question. Many chose Portia's disguise in the trial scene and its significance in freeing Antonio, but often without being able to refer to the text in any detail.

#### **WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *A Midsummer Night's Dream***

### Question 7

Effective answers looked at the comic syntactic confusion of Quince's speech, the aristocratic response to it, the amateur nature of the Mechanicals' approach to drama, Bottom's breaking of the fourth wall and the comedy of walls with moving parts and lions who may speak. Less effective approaches wrote in a general way about the lovers' chaos being over, wedding preparations and the play within a play idea being entertaining in itself, thus avoiding much close contact with the passage.

### Question 8

Much consideration was given to the idea of male dominance and candidates found many similarities in Theseus and Oberon's treatment of their wives, interference with the lovers and putting things to rights at the end of the play. Attention to the striking nature of Shakespeare's portrayal of the two characters was the discriminating factor here. Weaker answers were hampered by an inability to refer to episodes such as Theseus's judgement of Egeus's case for Hermia's marriage to Demetrius in any detail.

#### **WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *The Tempest***

### Question 9

Answers which understood the striking difference between Gonzalo's reaction to the shipwreck and the island, and the behaviour and responses of Antonio and Sebastian, fared well. Such responses also registered Alonso's grief and his own brother's lack of compassion. The contrasting responses to nature were explored and the significance understood. Less confident answers had difficulty identifying who said what in the dialogue, did not distinguish between the characters or realise that Sebastian and Antonio were speaking 'aside', wrote as if the men were all behaving in the same way, and confused Antonio and Alonso.

### Question 10

Most candidates could relate many examples of good overcoming evil in the play, but sophisticated answers either demonstrated an overview of the repentance/forgiveness theme or explored Prospero's overcoming of his desire for revenge. Knowledge of the plot was strong, but fewer candidates really engaged with the vividness of episodes such as the tempest itself, the banquet/harpy scene, and the comically unsuccessful Stephano/Trinculo/Caliban plot to kill Prospero. There was a tendency to treat the play as a novel rather than to place any emphasis on the vivid 'masque' effects Shakespeare uses. The most sophisticated answers questioned the degree to which good does overcome evil, especially with reference to Caliban and Antonio and Sebastian.

#### **OSCAR WILDE: *The Importance of Being Earnest***

### Question 11

Candidates managed to focus far more successfully on the entertainment factor in Wilde's play this session. Strong answers were aware of the context and situational irony, enjoyed Jack's melodramatic performance of grief, were amused by Miss Prism's absurdly unsympathetic and paradoxical statements and Dr Chasuble's sermon for all seasons. They commented on the comedy surrounding the christening and knew that the dead 'Ernest' was just about to make an unexpected appearance. Answers which avoided

generalised comments about Wilde's satire on Victorian values, with little reference to the passage, fared best.

### **Question 12**

This question was answered well when candidates noted the 'how far' element of the question and understood that Cecily was not totally sweet, simple or innocent, though she had some of these attributes.

A reference to Cecily's more assertive and acerbic moments at the tea party scene with Gwendolen with apt quotation featured in the best answers, and ample evidence, on the other side of the argument, given of her fantasy life, romantic obsession with 'Ernest', flower watering and familiarity with spades. Less successful responses had ideas but could not support them with close textual reference.

# LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

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Paper 0486/23

Drama 23

## Key Messages

- The strongest answers show awareness of the texts as drama scripts designed for performance.
- Most answers would be improved by closer textual reference, with direct quotation from the set passage or text as a whole to support the points made. Paraphrased reference is helpful but key quotations, used appropriately, will always lift the quality of an answer.
- Close and sustained attention to the wording of the question is a key feature of successful answers.
- Candidates need to focus more clearly on the language of the dialogue that the writers use. Excessive concentration on the wording of stage directions or on the writer's use of punctuation is generally unhelpful.

## General Comments

The best approach to extract-based questions is to establish the dramatic context quickly and then devote the bulk of the answer to discussing, quoting from and commenting on the extract itself – in the light of the question. Any whole-play reflections should be securely grounded in the detail of the extract.

The best answers to discursive questions focus rigorously on the terms of the question, address all the strands of the question, and range selectively across the text to find supporting detail for their arguments. Candidates who can weigh up competing arguments often prove to be the most successful.

A key feature of good answers is the selection of brief, well-integrated quotations to support and amplify ideas, accompanied by commentary on the effects created by the dramatist in these quotations.

Successful candidates see the texts as scripts for performance and themselves as members of an audience in order to visualise the onstage action and the staging, and respond to the evolving drama. Candidates are unlikely to engage fully with the drama if they regard themselves as “readers” only, and discuss stage directions as if they are merely tacked-on pieces of written communication. Too much speculation about the responses of different audiences (Elizabethan, Victorian, Post-WW2...) can obscure the candidate's own response.

The best introductory paragraphs focus on the terms of the question and on the particular text, and avoid unhelpful generalisations, biographical details or lists of techniques. The best conclusions avoid repetition and ensure that the question has been answered, often with the addition of a final, fresh idea.

The tendency to use labels (“capitalism...the American Dream...social responsibility...white magic...survivor guilt...satire...”) as if they speak for themselves and require no further exploration or supporting detail, proved unhelpful in many answers. The term “dramatic irony” was widely misapplied.

Rubric infringements on the two-answer (0486/23) paper were rare but, for the candidates involved, choosing two extract-based questions or two discursive questions meant that they were effectively reducing their available marks by half.

## **Comments on Specific Questions**

### **ARTHUR MILLER: *All My Sons***

#### **Question 1**

Successful candidates understood the climactic and pivotal nature of the scene, and often placed Chris's anguish in the context of his previously close relationship with his father and his faith in him. Close attention to the onstage action (the "*pursuit and escape*", the fist pounding, the stumbling, the weeping...) and to the powerful features of the dialogue (the interrogation, the repetition, the interruptions...) allowed candidates to convey the intensity of the emotions in the extract. Many engaged thoughtfully with the feelings of both characters and explored Joe's increasingly feeble attempts to deny the truth, in the face of Chris's fury and disillusion. The very best paid particular attention to Chris's only long speech, understood the impact of his own wartime experiences and identified the powerful contrast between the attitudes of son and father. The emphasis on Joe's loss of humanity in the description of him as an "animal" was often thoughtfully handled. Less successful candidates suggested that Chris is specifically blaming Joe for Larry's death at this point or that Chris has really known of Joe's guilt all along. There was a damaging tendency to launch into long thematic discussions of social responsibility or the American dream, and to lose contact with the extract, or to rely on feature-spotting and comments on punctuation divorced from the dramatic context.

#### **Question 2**

Candidates found much to say about Sue and Jim, if rather less about the Lubeys. Strong answers focused sharply on the dramatic function of these four characters, rather than drifting into story-telling or individual character studies. Jim's understanding of other characters, notably Joe, Chris, George and Kate, was often thoughtfully conveyed and his choric role sometimes suggested. The compromises he makes to earn money and the tensions in his marriage were sometimes cleverly related to the Kellers, and his admiration for Chris was particularly well handled. Sue's cynicism, dissatisfaction and materialistic values were also placed intelligently in the context of conflicts in the Keller family, particularly between Chris and his father, and her conversation with Ann proved a fruitful area for discussion. Frank was often seen as complicit in the maintenance of Kate's delusions about Larry, and all four seen as complicit in the neighbourhood's acceptance of Joe's guilt. The apparently contented and uncomplicated Lubeys were seen as the lucky ones who have escaped the damaging effects of the war, in contrast to the Kellers, to Ann and to Lydia's former admirer, George. Less successful candidates found the role of the Lubeys particularly hard to address and struggled to recollect helpful features like Frank's ill-timed arrival with Larry's horoscope chart, his good fortune in avoiding the draft, and Lydia's former relationship with George.

### **J.B. PRIESTLEY: *An Inspector Calls***

#### **Question 3**

Most candidates wrote confidently about the unsympathetic portrayal of Mr Birling in this extract and were able to link his smug indifference to the wellbeing of his employees to many of the play's significant issues, often building on the reference Eric makes to his rejection of the notion of "community". Although there was much focused comment on the rising tensions and the power struggle between Birling and the Inspector, candidates tended to focus rather too much on the play's themes, at the expense of close attention to the dramatic detail of the extract. The strongest answers brought out the effect of the Inspector's brief but challenging remarks and questions – on Birling, on Eric and on the audience. The best also looked in some detail at Eric's increasing willingness to confront his father and Gerald about their callous attitudes as employers, and at Birling's condescending treatment of his son. The irony in Birling's characterisation of Eva as a "good worker" was sometimes sensitively explored. Less successful answers tended to drift into unhelpfully generalised reflections on "capitalism" and "socialism", or into a narrative reworking of the "chain of events", and to lose contact with the extract.

#### **Question 4**

The best answers to this question demonstrated onstage conflict between Sheila and her mother by focusing in detail on two distinct moments. Particularly fruitful moments included: their different responses to Gerald's unexplained absence at "work"; Sheila's warnings to her mother about "beginning all wrong" with the Inspector; her demonstrations that she has greater knowledge of Eric and of Meggarty, and much greater sympathy for Eva despite her mother continuing to bully her and treat her like a child; and the many examples of her willingness to accept her guilt and to learn, in the face of her mother's arrogance and self-righteousness. Less successful candidates found specific moments of mother-daughter conflict hard to

identify and tended to offer contrasting character studies or a sweeping commentary on “generational differences”, rather than vivid dramatic detail. Some even focused on parts of the Inspector’s interrogation of Sheila when Mrs Birling is absent from the stage or simply lumped Mr and Mrs Birling together to demonstrate parental failings.

**WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *The Merchant of Venice***

**Question 5**

Careful reading of the question was the key discriminator here. Many candidates wrote convincingly about the second (“friendship”) strand of the question but found little to say about their specific impressions of Bassanio and his feelings for Portia, almost as if they were ignoring the second page of the extract. Nevertheless, there were many strong answers which paid close attention to the language (like the arrow metaphor, the Jason allusion, the money references...) to reach interesting, and often convincingly critical, conclusions about Bassanio. Some candidates even pursued the implications of the word “prodigal”, to suggest that the relationship between Bassanio and Antonio is very much that of an errant son and an indulgent, forgiving father. Most candidates understood the trust and intimacy between the two men and saw the dangerous consequences of Antonio’s generosity very clearly, although some, relying rather more on their memory of productions they may have seen than on scrutiny of the extract, became bogged down in speculation about Antonio’s sexual preferences.

**Question 6**

The best answers to this question suggested a range of possible responses to Jessica and Lorenzo and grounded these responses firmly in the detail of the play. They were seen as young lovers, devoted to each other and risking all in a daring nocturnal elopement, bridging the religious divide and offering a romantic antidote to the play’s bigotry. Jessica was perceived as a thoroughly sympathetic character, driven to escape from her hellish home by a repressive father, charmingly embarrassed by her boyish disguise and unflinching kind to Launcelot. The romantically moonlit scene which Jessica and Lorenzo share in Act Five was often explored to demonstrate their love and intimacy. There were contradictory impressions, however, usually based on the theft of Shylock’s jewels and gold, and on Tubal’s reports of Jessica’s profligacy, and there were also reservations about Jessica’s readiness to convert to Christianity. Some candidates were unreservedly hostile to both characters, but tended to assert critical conclusions (that Lorenzo is using Jessica, that their relationship is flawed and unhappy, that they are only interested in money...) without convincing support, though some took their allusions to doomed couples and their teasing exchanges in Act Five as evidence that their own relationship is doomed. Some lost contact with the question and tried to re-work essays devoted to Shylock. The strongest answers suggested a balance of feelings and made use of well selected reference to the text.

**WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *A Midsummer Night’s Dream***

**Question 7**

Close attention to the language and to the shift in mood within the extract was a central feature of successful answers to this question. The liveliness and pace of Puck’s humorous report to Oberon and the ways in which the mechanicals’ panic and Titania’s deluded love are conveyed were often thoughtfully handled, with careful exploration of the impact of particular images and couplets. Hermia’s dramatically evolving moods – anxious, suicidal, threatening, wheedling – were traced in some detail, and the dramatic ironies of her complete faith in Lysander when we know him to be in pursuit of Helena (under the influence of hallucinogens) and of our knowledge that Puck has juiced the wrong Athenian, thoughtfully unpicked, along with the effect of the framing device involving us watching Oberon and Puck watching Hermia and Demetrius. The best selected and explored the effect of specific ironies (“The sun was not so true unto the day As he to me”), of Hermia’s Titania-style images of global disorder and of the bitter, violent exchanges between Hermia and Demetrius. Less successful candidates skimmed over Puck’s long speech as if humour and drama were thought to be mutually exclusive, and focused almost entirely on the final part of the extract. It was widely believed that Puck, not Oberon, had applied the juice to Titania’s eyes.

**Question 8**

Confident candidates were able to weigh up the “extent” of the question and to suggest that despite their suffering, Helena and Hermia do not embrace victim-status and fight for the happy endings that they both achieve, with Hermia in particular defying her father, her Duke and the law in the process. It was much more common, however, for candidates to simply accept that the women are hapless victims of their patriarchal

society and to select evidence accordingly. The opening scene provided a fruitful area to demonstrate Hermia's apparent powerlessness, and the humiliating rejections endured by Helena at the hands of Demetrius were also explored in some detail. Some thoughtful distinctions between the two women emerged and Helena was felt to be the more likely candidate for victimhood, given her desperate and unrequited love, her insecurities and her willingness to betray her childhood friend. Even her happy ending was thought to be illusory given that Demetrius is still well and truly juiced. Weaker answers drifted into narrative and summarised their misfortunes without answering the question directly

***WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: The Tempest***

**Question 9**

Some candidates took up the opportunity to feel sympathy for Caliban with such enthusiasm that they ignored all counter-arguments, and either minimised the significance of his attempted rape of Miranda or ignored it altogether. The most successful candidates addressed the "extent" of the question directly and shaped more balanced arguments by exploring the language used by all three characters onstage. There was much sympathy for Caliban based on the first half of the extract, and on Prospero's violent abuse of him and threats of torture. Caliban's loss of his mother, his claim to the island, his initial love and kindness towards Prospero and Miranda, his subsequent confinement, powerlessness and enslavement were all cited as strong grounds for sympathy, until the revelation of his attack on Miranda. Strong answers noted the tone of Caliban's unrepentant revelling in the fact of this attack. Less successful answers were distracted from the detail of the extract by lengthy and generalised reflections on ideas such as colonisation or nature/nurture, or simply sided with the underdog based on narrow and highly selective references to the text. Some insisted that Prospero has killed Sycorax as part of his usurpation plan.

**Question 10**

Many candidates concluded that Miranda is indeed "perfect and peerless" and produced convincing and well-supported arguments based on her initial kindness to Caliban, her concern for the shipwrecked mariners, her sincere and passionate love for Ferdinand, her beauty, her modesty, her good humour and her sense of filial duty. Confident candidates attributed the description to Ferdinand and addressed the "How far" of the question directly, occasionally making subtle suggestions that her naivety (in seeing the treacherous castaways as "goodly", for instance) makes her somewhat less than perfect, or that she appears particularly unforgiving in her dealings with Caliban or that she occasionally disobeys her father. Less successful candidates took the word "peerless" literally and spent large parts of their answer showing that Miranda has no friends, or got bogged down in a very narrow range of ideas and references. A small minority misread the question and thought that the quotation was Miranda's "view" of other characters.

***OSCAR WILDE: The Importance of Being Earnest***

**Question 11**

Most candidates conveyed a sound awareness of the context for this extract, and were able to explore the layers of dramatic irony and the misapprehensions under which Cecily and Gwendolen are labouring. The most confident candidates made clear distinctions between what we know and what the young ladies onstage know, and saw this as a major source of entertainment: that Algy and Jack have both pretended to be Ernest (and Jack might turn out to be an Ernest), that they are now pretending to be brothers (but will turn out to be brothers), the ladies have both been deceived but are, in fact, engaged to different men so have no grounds for their current disagreement... and so on. However, the very best answers declared themselves, not just in the understanding of the dramatic ironies, but in the attention they paid to the sources of humour in the dialogue itself. Detailed exploration of the humour in the forced politeness and suppressed anger, especially in the presence of Merriman, in the increasingly formal address terms, in the citing of diary evidence, in the subtle point-scoring and assertions of social and geographical superiority was the principal characteristic of very strong answers. Less successful candidates picked out quotations and described them as "funny" or "entertaining" but found it difficult to explain why, or drifted into generalisations about Wilde's satire on Victorian values.



## Question 12

The most successful candidates were able to maintain their focus not only on the relationship between Jack and Algy, but also on the sources of amusement for an audience. Jack's romantic devotion to Gwendolen was often effectively contrasted with Algy's initial cynicism about marriage, and the humorous similarity between Algy's "Bunburying" in the country and Jack's "Ernesting" in the town was thoughtfully explored. The sibling rivalry in the food-scoffing arguments and in their mutual mockery was explored, and the fact that they do turn out to be siblings noted as a final entertaining twist. The farcical elements of the relationship, like the timing of Algy's arrival in the country, posing as the fictional Ernest just after Jack has announced his demise, were less well handled, and some answers were undermined by the drift into narrative. There was a tendency to write separate character studies and to contrast them as if Algy is completely dissolute and untrustworthy, and Jack a model of probity.

# LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

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Paper 0486/31

Drama 31

## Key messages

- Most answers would be improved by direct and accurate quotation from the set passage or text as a whole, in order to support the points made.
- Answers which avoid a narrative or descriptive approach and respond to the question are the most successful.
- Successful answers show awareness of the dramatist's methods and intentions.
- A detailed response to the drama genre was a feature of strong answers.
- Some candidates are not paying sufficient attention to the language the writers use. This is preventing a high level of achievement.

## General comments

In answer to the passage-based questions, the simplest route to improvement would be for candidates to use brief, well-integrated direct quotations and then to comment on the effects the dramatist creates. There were many instances this session of candidates referring to five lines of text and leaving the Examiner to decide which of these were relevant. Successful candidates read the question carefully and thought about its implications. They did not use the passage to tell the story of the play or as a peg on which to hang an answer to a question from a previous session.

Answering a question by referring almost solely to stage directions was a prevalent feature this session. Whereas some responses made effective use of the directions as having implications for an actor's interpretation of a role or movement and expression on stage, others wrote as if an audience can read the directions and be affected by them. Such responses often ignored the content and context of the dialogue, where the dramatic impact is inevitably the greatest. Some responses were limited by a description or explanation of the passage rather than an analysis of its impact and effects.

In answer to the discursive questions, candidates would benefit from learning quotations from the play as a whole. Often sound and developed arguments were restricted by lack of close textual reference in support. The strongest responses gave a clear line of argument, used a wide range of material and avoided using the passage in the previous question and re-telling the narrative. There were a few responses this session where candidates thought the discursive question related to the passage question. Candidates need to be clear that the two are entirely separate.

Responses which paid attention to key terms in the question, such as: 'strikingly... memorably... powerfully... entertaining', and considered the language, action and interaction in the drama achieved the best results.

The most useful introductions were those which focused attention immediately on the question and avoided lengthy context-setting, or giving historical background information. The time spent writing conclusions which merely re-iterated points already made could have been better used to give a wider range of ideas or more detailed analysis.

## **Comments on Specific Questions**

### **Section A DRAMA**

#### **ARTHUR MILLER: *All My Sons***

##### **Question 1**

This was a very popular text and question. Most candidates understood the increasing tension between Keller and Chris and some of the reasons for it, including: Ann's visit and Chris and Ann's marriage plans, the telephone call from George after his visit to see their father, and the significance of what he has learned. The most successful answers responded to both 'dramatic' and 'significant' focusing on the stage directions showing Keller's uneasiness and Chris's emotions, for example, '*hurt*' and '*angry*', and his suspicions after Keller's exaggerated protestations that '*there's nothing wrong with that money*'. They were aware of the parallel conversations and the 'pauses' to indicate George's answers, which the audience can only imagine, but with strong clues from Keller's behaviour and suspicions about Ann and George. The dramatic effects of the conversations and the way they affect pace, mood and tone were understood. The strongest answers also used the whole passage and avoided re-telling too much of the play before this scene.

Less successful answers spent too much time contextualising the passage, re-telling the story of the cracked cylinder heads and Kate's failure to accept Larry's death as an obstacle to Chris and Ann's marriage. They also focused on stage directions and punctuation rather than what was actually happening in the passage.

##### **Question 2**

Successful answers described the changes in the relationship between Keller and Chris at the beginning of the play, and traced it through the play. Comments were supported with apt quotation to show how Chris gradually becomes uneasy at his father's attitude to money, then suspecting him of wrongdoing and finally after the reading of Larry's letter, becoming disgusted with his father's behaviour – wanting him to accept his just, if somewhat belated, punishment. They took into account the way Chris feels overshadowed by Larry and that the father-son relationship is difficult, but were able to demonstrate that there is love and respect between them. Keller's desire to provide for his family, and Chris's future with the business, as a motive for sending the cracked cylinders was also explored. Different views of Keller's suicide emerged with some arguing that he could not face the shame of going to jail and having failed his family, whilst some argued that he deliberately killed himself to give Chris the opportunity to start his life without the stain of Keller's guilt. The best responses supported their view with close reference to the text.

Weaker responses discussed the relationship at the end rather than exploring it throughout the play, or wrote character studies losing focus on the question and what was 'memorable' about their relationship. These also failed to support their answer with textual reference, tending to narrate the story behind the conflict. Some candidates only used information from the passage meaning their evaluation of the relationship was limited.

#### **J.B. PRIESTLEY: *An Inspector Calls***

##### **Question 3**

This was a popular choice of text and question. Successful answers quickly established the context and moved on to explore how Mrs Birling's sense of moral, financial and social superiority are brought into question by the end of this passage. The best responses linked Mrs Birling's impertinent responses, her defiant silence and final powerlessness in being implicated in the death of Eva Smith, to the systematic methods of interrogation by the Inspector. The dramatic tension created was a key feature of these responses with some close analysis of the stage directions, for example, the reference to '*bewildered and frightened glances*' at the Inspector's insistence that he needs Eric and will find him if he does not return. The Inspector's methods; abrupt, precise questions to which he already knew the answers, coupled with his authority, and refusal to be cowed by Mrs Birling all create dramatic tension. The way Mrs Birling interacts with the Inspector, comparing their tones, manners and exchanges were detailed and supported by textual references, showing awareness of the audience and their expectations. Revealing aspects were also explored such as: Sheila siding with the Inspector, encouraging her mother to tell the truth, Mr Birling

supporting his wife, and Eric being next to be interrogated with clear hints of the reasons for this in the reference to Eva's pregnancy and her calling herself 'Mrs Birling'.

Less successful responses re-told the passage, or play, focusing just on Mrs Birling or events leading to this moment, failing to notice the shift of power in this scene. They saw her simply as a very arrogant person, who used her power to influence the Committee's decision against Eva. Weaker candidates also misinterpreted Mrs Birling's reaction, and thought she succumbed and admitted her guilt.

#### Question 4

This was not a popular question, but produced some passionate personal responses to Sheila and whether or not the writer makes it possible to sympathise with her or not for the part she played in the suicide of Eva Smith. Successful responses gave a comprehensive account of Sheila with a wide range of references and insights into the whole text, tracing the way she changes and why. Growing sympathy was shown for Sheila as the play progresses, with exploration of her remorse, guilt and maturity towards the end: she is truly sorry and tries to make her parents understand; returning the ring to Gerald indicates her moral growth and more perceptive candidates made wider comments about her significance as the voice of reason and hope, in contrast to the older generation.

Less successful responses gave a character sketch, tended to be simplistic or generalised in comments about Sheila and did not answer the question – whether they felt sympathy for her and why.

#### **WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *The Merchant of Venice***

#### Question 5

This was a popular question and it was helpful for candidates to briefly identify the context of the passage. Most candidates were able to show awareness of the audience by identifying dramatic irony - Portia in disguise, defending Antonio, apparently being on Shylock's side (though few could see her reasoning for doing this) to set the trap for Shylock and ultimately save Antonio's life. The most successful responses addressed the 'powerful' and 'memorable' aspects of the question as two separate (but linked) elements and explored the passage in full, engaging with the situation and the language of the scene. Comments were made about Shylock's hyperbole and how his character is portrayed, whilst also considering the subtext of Antonio's farewell speech. Analysis of this speech, especially, '*Say how I lov'd you*' was given as evidence of his love for Bassanio and readiness to give his life for him. A few candidates lost focus here and embarked on an exploration of their relationship, but the best were able to appreciate that the humour in Bassanio and Gratiano's willingness to sacrifice their wives, unaware of their presence, to save Antonio was used to break the tension. Shylock's praise of Portia and her desire to proceed with the ruling, his insistence on the terms of the bond and the rising tension, were also explored with some close detail to the writing.

Less successful responses re-told the plot or passage and lost focus on the question, berating Shylock for his hatred of Antonio and Christians here, and elsewhere, in the play. Some identified features such as irony but without looking in detail at the text, or considering its significance and impact on the audience.

#### Question 6

A much less popular question. Responses were not always focused on the terms of the question. A common misunderstanding was to explore whether Portia deserves Bassanio. The most successful responses were able to address the 'how far' by carefully considering at what stage Bassanio does, or does not, deserve Portia: exploration of his need of money to finance his lifestyle, his borrowing of money to appear a more worthy, wealthy suitor, being the cause of Antonio's possible death and the fact that he is 'tricking' Portia, indicated that he did not deserve her. However, his ability to choose the correct casket, his obvious love for Portia (and her love for him) as well as his attempts to save Antonio, showing him to be a good friend, made him deserving of her. These responses were supported by some response to Shakespeare's writing, and some relevant words or phrases to support comments. A few perceptive comments were made on Portia's father's good sense in using the caskets to sift out a suitable husband for his daughter: by choosing the correct casket Bassanio clearly deserved her. There was some well-chosen detail to support responses.

Weaker responses narrated the plot involving Bassanio, often with the casket-choosing scene at length but without linking the detail to the question.

**WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *A Midsummer Night's Dream***

**Question 7**

Too few answers were submitted to make comment appropriate.

**Question 8**

Too few answers were submitted to make comment appropriate.

**WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *The Tempest***

**Question 9**

This was quite popular and the focus on 'memorable' addressed in some way: some candidates explored the visual humour of the moment, saw Caliban's fear of Prospero's magical powers and saw the more serious intent expressed by Stephano to make use of Caliban, supporting comments with apt textual detail and quotation. The significance of the moment where the conspiracy against Prospero is set up here was also explored. The most successful responses recognised that this scene marks a shift in tone of the play with the introduction of humour, and visual comedy, and explored how Shakespeare's presentation of Caliban has changed the audience's impressions of him from a villain, to a tormented and badly treated servant, for whom much sympathy may be felt at this point. Exploration of the language was also a feature of these responses.

Less successful responses re-told the passage and plot, lacking focus on what was 'memorable'. There was some misunderstanding of the moment and comic effects created, indicating limited knowledge of the play.

**Question 10**

This was a less popular question. Most candidates focused immediately on comparing Prospero's treatment of Caliban and Ariel, and were able to balance their arguments with references from across the text that showed Prospero clearly acting as a 'cruel master'. The best responses focused on the full terms of the question, 'To what extent', highlighting his differing treatment of them, and acknowledging the audience's understanding of why Prospero behaved as he did; for example, Caliban's attempted rape of Miranda and justifying his delay in freeing Ariel in his pursuit of justice and reconciliation. Prospero's initial treatment of Caliban was also used to justify his later, cruel treatment. More perceptive responses used examples of his friendship with Ariel and argued how the audience were aware that Prospero would ultimately maintain his promise to Ariel. Some also explored his treatment of Ferdinand, and were able to justify this with relevant references and understanding of Prospero's intentions and protectiveness of Miranda.

Less successful responses narrated Prospero's relationship with Ariel and/or Caliban focusing on 'master' or 'cruel' rather than 'cruel master'. This also led to some re-telling of his relationship with all characters due to his cruelty in bringing about the initial storm. A closer reading of the question was required.

**OSCAR WILDE: *The Importance of Being Earnest***

**Question 11**

This was a very popular text, and question, with much to explore in the passage. It was pleasing to see such genuine engagement with the text and question. The key word 'entertaining' allowed for various interpretations, including the definition of 'drama' and how the writer engages the audience but predominantly, it helped candidates to focus on the humorous aspects of the passage. Some knowledge of the context was useful, with Jack's determination to keep Algernon from Cecily and his '*melancholy manner*' and dress, having previously announced the death of his 'brother', were understood by most candidates. The best responses conveyed this briefly, moving through the passage in detail, exploring the irony, confusions, dramatic irony and word-play in the language. They were able to identify the absurdity of the scene: Cecily's naivety, the tension between Jack and Algernon and the way Miss Prism reacts to the news that Ernest is still alive. Engagement with the action and dialogue of the passage was also a feature of these responses and rather than explaining or justifying characters' motivations, the trivialities in the dialogue were explored, linking these to farcical humour used to mock the upper classes. The fact that the audience are aware of everything, Jack's hypocrisy, and the playwright's intent in satirising Victorian morality and excessive concern for appearances over substance were clearly understood.

There was a tendency for weaker candidates to write about the Victorians, providing social and historical background, without consideration of the terms of the question or the passage. There was too much re-telling of the plot in these responses, confusion about the situation here and about the play in general.

**Question 12**

Too few answers were submitted to make comment appropriate.



# LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

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Paper 0486/32

Drama 32

## Key messages

- Most answers would be improved by direct and accurate quotation from the set passage or text as a whole, in order to support the points made.
- Answers which avoid a narrative or descriptive approach and respond to the question are the most successful.
- Successful answers show awareness of the dramatist's methods and intentions.
- A detailed response to the drama genre was a feature of strong answers.
- Some candidates are not paying sufficient attention to the language the writers use. This is preventing a high level of achievement.

## General comments

In answer to the passage-based questions, the simplest route to improvement would be for candidates to use brief, well-integrated direct quotations and then to comment on the effects the dramatist creates. There were many instances this session of candidates referring to five lines of text and leaving the Examiner to decide which of these were relevant. Successful candidates read the question carefully and thought about its implications. They did not use the passage to tell the story of the play or as a peg on which to hang an answer to a question from a previous session.

Answering a question by referring almost solely to stage directions was a prevalent feature this session. Whereas some responses made effective use of the directions as having implications for an actor's interpretation of a role or movement and expression on stage, others wrote as if an audience can read the directions and be affected by them. Such responses often ignored the content and context of the dialogue, where the dramatic impact is inevitably the greatest. Some responses were limited by a description or explanation of the passage rather than an analysis of its impact and effects.

In answer to the discursive questions, candidates would benefit from learning quotations from the play as a whole. Often sound and developed arguments were restricted by lack of close textual reference in support.

The strongest responses gave a clear line of argument, used a wide range of material, avoided using the passage in the previous question and refrained from re-telling the narrative. There were a few responses this session where candidates thought the discursive question related to the passage question. Candidates need to be clear that the two are entirely separate.

Responses which paid attention to key terms in the question, such as: 'strikingly... memorably... powerfully... entertaining', and considered the language, action and interaction in the drama achieved the best results.

The most useful introductions were those which focused attention immediately on the question and avoided lengthy context-setting, or giving historical background information. The time spent writing conclusions which merely re-iterated points already made could have been better used to give a wider range of ideas or more detailed analysis.

## **Comments on Specific Questions**

### **Section A DRAMA**

#### **ARTHUR MILLER: *All My Sons***

##### **Question 1**

This was answered well when candidates commented on it as an 'introduction' to Kate and analysed 'striking' features such as her insistence that Larry is alive, her defensiveness over Ann's arrival, and the vividness and emotional power of her nightmare. Strong answers placed themselves in the position of an audience who have partial knowledge at this stage of the play and, therefore, find it odd that Kate is pleased at the memorial tree falling down. They then commented on how the seeds of the drama as a whole are sown for the audience in this passage. Less effective answers explained the scene and its retrospective context.

##### **Question 2**

This question was answered most successfully when candidates explored the impact of the relationship between Steve and George Deever on George himself, and subsequently on the play as a whole. Many answers were merely explanatory or narrative. The best looked at the powerful impact George's meeting with his father has had, as shown in the confrontation between George and the Keller family. There was also an exploration of the contrasting paths the George/Steve: Joe/Chris relationships take in the play and the themes of guilt, betrayal and justice embodied in this relationship. Weaker answers confused Steve and George.

#### **J.B. PRIESTLEY: *An Inspector Calls***

##### **Question 3**

Many candidates showed a sophisticated awareness of Priestley's aims, and of the political ideas in the play. Some expressed these more effectively than others. Strong answers to this question selected the dramatic effects such as the Inspector's taking control, the power of his presence and language and the generational conflict which ensues on his departure. The dramatic effectiveness of his final speech, with attention to its imagery, featured in such answers but was ignored in less focused responses. Less successful approaches described the events or featured misconceptions, such as Eric not being regretful and Birling offering a bribe to the Inspector.

##### **Question 4**

Approaches to this question were varied, with some looking at Eva's portrayal via her encounters with the Birlings and Gerald and their descriptions of her. Others looked at how Priestley makes her the Centre of attention and a symbolic representative of the oppressed working class, her non-appearance made effective by the supernatural intervention of the Inspector championing her cause. These approaches gave candidates more scope than one which narrated the other characters' involvement with her, without saying much about Eva herself or considering Priestley's artistic decisions.

#### **WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *The Merchant of Venice***

##### **Question 5**

There were a wide range of responses to this question, and a tendency to use the passage as a consideration of Shylock as victim or villain in the play as a whole. Those who avoided repeating inappropriately a question from a previous session fared better. The best answers understood that the question asks about the candidate's mixed feelings, not Shylock's, remembered that this is the audience's first encounter with him, scrutinised the passage carefully, understood that Shylock qualifies 'good man' to mean financially 'sufficient', and could see that his accepting a risky deal hints at an ulterior motive, amplified by his asides and comments on eating with Christians. There were effective, sophisticated and exploratory readings but also answers which narrated subsequent events, wrote extensively about the 'pound of flesh', which occurs after the passage, and ignored the question altogether.

### Question 6

The strongest responses ranged widely across the various examples of 'false appearances' in the play and looked at their significance, rather than merely observing them. Discrimination sprang from the convincing nature of the argument and the candidates' ability to provide precise evidence. Some took this as an opportunity to write about Shylock as victim and Antonio as villain, which though valid and ably executed by some, often tended to cover familiar ground without really engaging with the appearance/reality theme. There were some surprising misunderstandings of 'false appearances' as meaning minor characters, and some candidates retold the events of the casket choosing without relating this to the question. Many chose Portia's disguise in the trial scene and its significance in freeing Antonio, but often without being able to refer to the text in any detail.

#### **WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *A Midsummer Night's Dream***

### Question 7

Effective answers looked at the comic syntactic confusion of Quince's speech, the aristocratic response to it, the amateur nature of the Mechanicals' approach to drama, Bottom's breaking of the fourth wall and the comedy of walls with moving parts and lions who may speak. Less effective approaches wrote in a general way about the lovers' chaos being over, wedding preparations and the play within a play idea being entertaining in itself, thus avoiding much close contact with the passage.

### Question 8

Much consideration was given to the idea of male dominance and candidates found many similarities in Theseus and Oberon's treatment of their wives, interference with the lovers and putting things to rights at the end of the play. Attention to the striking nature of Shakespeare's portrayal of the two characters was the discriminating factor here. Weaker answers were hampered by an inability to refer to episodes such as Theseus's judgement of Egeus's case for Hermia's marriage to Demetrius in any detail.

#### **WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *The Tempest***

### Question 9

Answers which understood the striking difference between Gonzalo's reaction to the shipwreck and the island, and the behaviour and responses of Antonio and Sebastian, fared well. Such responses also registered Alonso's grief and his own brother's lack of compassion. The contrasting responses to nature were explored and the significance understood. Less confident answers had difficulty identifying who said what in the dialogue, did not distinguish between the characters or realise that Sebastian and Antonio were speaking 'aside', wrote as if the men were all behaving in the same way, and confused Antonio and Alonso.

### Question 10

Most candidates could relate many examples of good overcoming evil in the play, but sophisticated answers either demonstrated an overview of the repentance/forgiveness theme or explored Prospero's overcoming of his desire for revenge. Knowledge of the plot was strong, but fewer candidates really engaged with the vividness of episodes such as the tempest itself, the banquet/harpy scene, and the comically unsuccessful Stephano/Trinculo/Caliban plot to kill Prospero. There was a tendency to treat the play as a novel rather than to place any emphasis on the vivid 'masque' effects Shakespeare uses. The most sophisticated answers questioned the degree to which good does overcome evil, especially with reference to Caliban and Antonio and Sebastian.

#### **OSCAR WILDE: *The Importance of Being Earnest***

### Question 11

Candidates managed to focus far more successfully on the entertainment factor in Wilde's play this session. Strong answers were aware of the context and situational irony, enjoyed Jack's melodramatic performance of grief, were amused by Miss Prism's absurdly unsympathetic and paradoxical statements and Dr Chasuble's sermon for all seasons. They commented on the comedy surrounding the christening and knew that the dead 'Ernest' was just about to make an unexpected appearance. Answers which avoided generalised comments about Wilde's satire on Victorian values, with little reference to the passage, fared best.

## Question 12

This question was answered well when candidates noted the 'how far' element of the question and understood that Cecily was not totally sweet, simple or innocent, though she had some of these attributes.

A reference to Cecily's more assertive and acerbic moments at the tea party scene with Gwendolen with apt quotation featured in the best answers, and ample evidence, on the other side of the argument, given of her fantasy life, romantic obsession with 'Ernest', flower watering and familiarity with spades. Less successful responses had ideas but could not support them with close textual reference.

# LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

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**Paper 0486/33**

**Drama 33**

## Key Messages

- The strongest answers show awareness of the texts as drama scripts designed for performance.
- Most answers would be improved by closer textual reference, with direct quotation from the set passage or text as a whole to support the points made. Paraphrased reference is helpful but key quotations, used appropriately, will always lift the quality of an answer.
- Close and sustained attention to the wording of the question is a key feature of successful answers.
- Candidates need to focus more clearly on the language of the dialogue that the writers use. Excessive concentration on the wording of stage directions or on the writer's use of punctuation is generally unhelpful.

## General Comments

The best approach to extract-based questions is to establish the dramatic context quickly and then devote the bulk of the answer to discussing, quoting from and commenting on the extract itself – in the light of the question. Any whole-play reflections should be securely grounded in the detail of the extract.

The best answers to discursive questions focus rigorously on the terms of the question, address all the strands of the question, and range selectively across the text to find supporting detail for their arguments. Candidates who can weigh up competing arguments often prove to be the most successful.

A key feature of good answers is the selection of brief, well-integrated quotations to support and amplify ideas, accompanied by commentary on the effects created by the dramatist in these quotations.

Successful candidates see the texts as scripts for performance and themselves as members of an audience in order to visualise the onstage action and the staging, and respond to the evolving drama. Candidates are unlikely to engage fully with the drama if they regard themselves as “readers” only, and discuss stage directions as if they are merely tacked-on pieces of written communication. Too much speculation about the responses of different audiences (Elizabethan, Victorian, Post-WW2...) can obscure the candidate's own response.

The best introductory paragraphs focus on the terms of the question and on the particular text, and avoid unhelpful generalisations, biographical details or lists of techniques. The best conclusions avoid repetition and ensure that the question has been answered, often with the addition of a final, fresh idea.

The tendency to use labels (“capitalism...the American Dream...social responsibility...white magic...survivor guilt...satire...”) as if they speak for themselves and require no further exploration or supporting detail, proved unhelpful in many answers. The term “dramatic irony” was widely misapplied.

## **Comments on Specific Questions**

### **ARTHUR MILLER: *All My Sons***

#### **Question 1**

Successful candidates understood the climactic and pivotal nature of the scene, and often placed Chris's anguish in the context of his previously close relationship with his father and his faith in him. Close attention to the onstage action (the "*pursuit and escape*", the fist pounding, the stumbling, the weeping...) and to the powerful features of the dialogue (the interrogation, the repetition, the interruptions...) allowed candidates to convey the intensity of the emotions in the extract. Many engaged thoughtfully with the feelings of both characters and explored Joe's increasingly feeble attempts to deny the truth, in the face of Chris's fury and disillusion. The very best paid particular attention to Chris's only long speech, understood the impact of his own wartime experiences and identified the powerful contrast between the attitudes of son and father. The emphasis on Joe's loss of humanity in the description of him as an "animal" was often thoughtfully handled. Less successful candidates suggested that Chris is specifically blaming Joe for Larry's death at this point or that Chris has really known of Joe's guilt all along. There was a damaging tendency to launch into long thematic discussions of social responsibility or the American dream, and to lose contact with the extract, or to rely on feature-spotting and comments on punctuation divorced from the dramatic context.

#### **Question 2**

Candidates found much to say about Sue and Jim, if rather less about the Lubeys. Strong answers focused sharply on the dramatic function of these four characters, rather than drifting into story-telling or individual character studies. Jim's understanding of other characters, notably Joe, Chris, George and Kate, was often thoughtfully conveyed and his choric role sometimes suggested. The compromises he makes to earn money and the tensions in his marriage were sometimes cleverly related to the Kellers, and his admiration for Chris was particularly well handled. Sue's cynicism, dissatisfaction and materialistic values were also placed intelligently in the context of conflicts in the Keller family, particularly between Chris and his father, and her conversation with Ann proved a fruitful area for discussion. Frank was often seen as complicit in the maintenance of Kate's delusions about Larry, and all four seen as complicit in the neighbourhood's acceptance of Joe's guilt. The apparently contented and uncomplicated Lubeys were seen as the lucky ones who have escaped the damaging effects of the war, in contrast to the Kellers, to Ann and to Lydia's former admirer, George. Less successful candidates found the role of the Lubeys particularly hard to address and struggled to recollect helpful features like Frank's ill-timed arrival with Larry's horoscope chart, his good fortune in avoiding the draft, and Lydia's former relationship with George.

### **J.B. PRIESTLEY: *An Inspector Calls***

#### **Question 3**

Most candidates wrote confidently about the unsympathetic portrayal of Mr Birling in this extract and were able to link his smug indifference to the wellbeing of his employees to many of the play's significant issues, often building on the reference Eric makes to his rejection of the notion of "community". Although there was much focused comment on the rising tensions and the power struggle between Birling and the Inspector, candidates tended to focus rather too much on the play's themes, at the expense of close attention to the dramatic detail of the extract. The strongest answers brought out the effect of the Inspector's brief but challenging remarks and questions – on Birling, on Eric and on the audience. The best also looked in some detail at Eric's increasing willingness to confront his father and Gerald about their callous attitudes as employers, and at Birling's condescending treatment of his son. The irony in Birling's characterisation of Eva as a "good worker" was sometimes sensitively explored. Less successful answers tended to drift into unhelpfully generalised reflections on "capitalism" and "socialism", or into a narrative reworking of the "chain of events", and to lose contact with the extract.

#### **Question 4**

The best answers to this question demonstrated onstage conflict between Sheila and her mother by focusing in detail on two distinct moments. Particularly fruitful moments included: their different responses to Gerald's unexplained absence at "work"; Sheila's warnings to her mother about "beginning all wrong" with the Inspector; her demonstrations that she has greater knowledge of Eric and of Meggarty, and much greater sympathy for Eva despite her mother continuing to bully her and treat her like a child; and the many examples of her willingness to accept her guilt and to learn, in the face of her mother's arrogance and self-righteousness. Less successful candidates found specific moments of mother-daughter conflict hard to



identify and tended to offer contrasting character studies or a sweeping commentary on “generational differences”, rather than vivid dramatic detail. Some even focused on parts of the Inspector’s interrogation of Sheila when Mrs Birling is absent from the stage or simply lumped Mr and Mrs Birling together to demonstrate parental failings.

**WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *The Merchant of Venice***

**Question 5**

Careful reading of the question was the key discriminator here. Many candidates wrote convincingly about the second (“friendship”) strand of the question but found little to say about their specific impressions of Bassanio and his feelings for Portia, almost as if they were ignoring the second page of the extract. Nevertheless, there were many strong answers which paid close attention to the language (like the arrow metaphor, the Jason allusion, the money references...) to reach interesting, and often convincingly critical, conclusions about Bassanio. Some candidates even pursued the implications of the word “prodigal”, to suggest that the relationship between Bassanio and Antonio is very much that of an errant son and an indulgent, forgiving father. Most candidates understood the trust and intimacy between the two men and saw the dangerous consequences of Antonio’s generosity very clearly, although some, relying rather more on their memory of productions they may have seen than on scrutiny of the extract, became bogged down in speculation about Antonio’s sexual preferences.

**Question 6**

The best answers to this question suggested a range of possible responses to Jessica and Lorenzo and grounded these responses firmly in the detail of the play. They were seen as young lovers, devoted to each other and risking all in a daring nocturnal elopement, bridging the religious divide and offering a romantic antidote to the play’s bigotry. Jessica was perceived as a thoroughly sympathetic character, driven to escape from her hellish home by a repressive father, charmingly embarrassed by her boyish disguise and unflinchingly kind to Launcelot. The romantically moonlit scene which Jessica and Lorenzo share in Act Five was often explored to demonstrate their love and intimacy. There were contradictory impressions, however, usually based on the theft of Shylock’s jewels and gold, and on Tubal’s reports of Jessica’s profligacy, and there were also reservations about Jessica’s readiness to convert to Christianity. Some candidates were unreservedly hostile to both characters, but tended to assert critical conclusions (that Lorenzo is using Jessica, that their relationship is flawed and unhappy, that they are only interested in money...) without convincing support, though some took their allusions to doomed couples and their teasing exchanges in Act Five as evidence that their own relationship is doomed. Some lost contact with the question and tried to re-work essays devoted to Shylock. The strongest answers suggested a balance of feelings and made use of well selected reference to the text.

**WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *A Midsummer Night’s Dream***

**Question 7**

Close attention to the language and to the shift in mood within the extract was a central feature of successful answers to this question. The liveliness and pace of Puck’s humorous report to Oberon and the ways in which the mechanicals’ panic and Titania’s deluded love are conveyed were often thoughtfully handled, with careful exploration of the impact of particular images and couplets. Hermia’s dramatically evolving moods – anxious, suicidal, threatening, wheedling – were traced in some detail, and the dramatic ironies of her complete faith in Lysander when we know him to be in pursuit of Helena (under the influence of hallucinogens) and of our knowledge that Puck has juiced the wrong Athenian, thoughtfully unpicked, along with the effect of the framing device involving us watching Oberon and Puck watching Hermia and Demetrius. The best selected and explored the effect of specific ironies (“The sun was not so true unto the day As he to me”), of Hermia’s Titania-style images of global disorder and of the bitter, violent exchanges between Hermia and Demetrius. Less successful candidates skimmed over Puck’s long speech as if humour and drama were thought to be mutually exclusive, and focused almost entirely on the final part of the extract. It was widely believed that Puck, not Oberon, had applied the juice to Titania’s eyes.

**Question 8**

Confident candidates were able to weigh up the “extent” of the question and to suggest that despite their suffering, Helena and Hermia do not embrace victim-status and fight for the happy endings that they both achieve, with Hermia in particular defying her father, her Duke and the law in the process. It was much more common, however, for candidates to simply accept that the women are hapless victims of their patriarchal

society and to select evidence accordingly. The opening scene provided a fruitful area to demonstrate Hermia's apparent powerlessness, and the humiliating rejections endured by Helena at the hands of Demetrius were also explored in some detail. Some thoughtful distinctions between the two women emerged and Helena was felt to be the more likely candidate for victimhood, given her desperate and unrequited love, her insecurities and her willingness to betray her childhood friend. Even her happy ending was thought to be illusory given that Demetrius is still well and truly juiced. Weaker answers drifted into narrative and summarised their misfortunes without answering the question directly

***WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: The Tempest***

**Question 9**

Some candidates took up the opportunity to feel sympathy for Caliban with such enthusiasm that they ignored all counter-arguments, and either minimised the significance of his attempted rape of Miranda or ignored it altogether. The most successful candidates addressed the "extent" of the question directly and shaped more balanced arguments by exploring the language used by all three characters onstage. There was much sympathy for Caliban based on the first half of the extract, and on Prospero's violent abuse of him and threats of torture. Caliban's loss of his mother, his claim to the island, his initial love and kindness towards Prospero and Miranda, his subsequent confinement, powerlessness and enslavement were all cited as strong grounds for sympathy, until the revelation of his attack on Miranda. Strong answers noted the tone of Caliban's unrepentant revelling in the fact of this attack. Less successful answers were distracted from the detail of the extract by lengthy and generalised reflections on ideas such as colonisation or nature/nurture, or simply sided with the underdog based on narrow and highly selective references to the text. Some insisted that Prospero has killed Sycorax as part of his usurpation plan.

**Question 10**

Many candidates concluded that Miranda is indeed "perfect and peerless" and produced convincing and well-supported arguments based on her initial kindness to Caliban, her concern for the shipwrecked mariners, her sincere and passionate love for Ferdinand, her beauty, her modesty, her good humour and her sense of filial duty. Confident candidates attributed the description to Ferdinand and addressed the "How far" of the question directly, occasionally making subtle suggestions that her naivety (in seeing the treacherous castaways as "goodly", for instance) makes her somewhat less than perfect, or that she appears particularly unforgiving in her dealings with Caliban or that she occasionally disobeys her father. Less successful candidates took the word "peerless" literally and spent large parts of their answer showing that Miranda has no friends, or got bogged down in a very narrow range of ideas and references. A small minority misread the question and thought that the quotation was Miranda's "view" of other characters.

***OSCAR WILDE: The Importance of Being Earnest***

**Question 11**

Most candidates conveyed a sound awareness of the context for this extract, and were able to explore the layers of dramatic irony and the misapprehensions under which Cecily and Gwendolen are labouring. The most confident candidates made clear distinctions between what we know and what the young ladies onstage know, and saw this as a major source of entertainment: that Algy and Jack have both pretended to be Ernest (and Jack might turn out to be an Ernest), that they are now pretending to be brothers (but will turn out to be brothers), the ladies have both been deceived but are, in fact, engaged to different men so have no grounds for their current disagreement... and so on. However, the very best answers declared themselves, not just in the understanding of the dramatic ironies, but in the attention they paid to the sources of humour in the dialogue itself. Detailed exploration of the humour in the forced politeness and suppressed anger, especially in the presence of Merriman, in the increasingly formal address terms, in the citing of diary evidence, in the subtle point-scoring and assertions of social and geographical superiority was the principal characteristic of very strong answers. Less successful candidates picked out quotations and described them as "funny" or "entertaining" but found it difficult to explain why, or drifted into generalisations about Wilde's satire on Victorian values.

## Question 12

The most successful candidates were able to maintain their focus not only on the relationship between Jack and Algy, but also on the sources of amusement for an audience. Jack's romantic devotion to Gwendolen was often effectively contrasted with Algy's initial cynicism about marriage, and the humorous similarity between Algy's "Bunburying" in the country and Jack's "Ernesting" in the town was thoughtfully explored. The sibling rivalry in the food-scoffing arguments and in their mutual mockery was explored, and the fact that they do turn out to be siblings noted as a final entertaining twist. The farcical elements of the relationship, like the timing of Algy's arrival in the country, posing as the fictional Ernest just after Jack has announced his demise, were less well handled, and some answers were undermined by the drift into narrative. There was a tendency to write separate character studies and to contrast them as if Algy is completely dissolute and untrustworthy, and Jack a model of probity.

# LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

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Paper 0486/41

Unseen 41

## Key Messages

- Candidates should be prepared to tackle either poetry or prose, and give time to making a careful choice at the beginning of the exam.
- Planning leads to stronger responses: better answers usually have an overview of the writer's purpose and the candidate's personal response to their reading in their introduction.
- The most effective quotation is brief and embedded within the candidate's answer. It is also followed by comments on the effects of those words or images.
- Stronger responses are usually structured around either the bullet points or the structure of the passage itself, and not around a checklist of literary devices.
- Stronger responses responded with care to the wording of the question, and generally used the bullet points to help them to develop their arguments.

The majority of candidates responded positively to the unseen poetry and prose, this series, with many demonstrating well-developed critical skills. It was clear that many candidates had a real understanding of how writers achieve their effects and they engaged with the unseen work with some relish. There was an encouraging increase in the number of candidates willing to tackle the prose passage rather than the poem.

Short poems are often more difficult and more elusive than they appear, and this year's poetry was quite abstract. Examiners are trained to be open to a wide range of interpretations of tone and mood, but such readings always need to be supported by textual evidence from the poem. First impressions need to be developed through a closer look at each stage of a poem, paying particular attention to its visual images, and thus working out a precise understanding of the meaning of each of them before making them cohere as far as possible. A frequent mistake is to construct a narrative for the poem of the candidate's own invention, and then using quotations to illustrate it, rather than making meaning out of the effects of language and structure.

Prose passages, in contrast, generally do give a clear narrative for candidates to structure their responses around. However, for anything other than modest marks, it is important that response goes beyond a paraphrase with textual support and begins to explore the writer's language and its effects. A good start is to consider the genre of the piece of writing: what kind of text is it? What kind of reaction does the writer want from her or his audience? How does the language of the writing correspond to that genre? What kind of tension or climax does that kind of writing require? The rubric before the question will help: it does tell candidates whether the passage is fiction, non-fictional autobiography or travel writing, and whether it is at the beginning or end of a novel or short story. This should assist in appreciating the purpose of the writing.

Prose writing can contain as much imagery as verse: candidates should be encouraged to highlight question papers and to draw out unusual words and figurative language. Such language does not merely illustrate the story. It is intended to have an effect on the way the reader sees and feels about the narrative of the prose or poem. Key terms are all the literary terms which describe how we see objects through comparison, or hear rhythms and sounds whether in poetry and prose. Language which appeals to the senses changes the feelings of the reader, contributing to the mood of the writing. The tone of the writing also influences the reader's reaction, and is produced by the sounds and contrasts of the language.

Good answers are focused on language and are full of brief quotations with comment on the effect of the writer's choices. Comment on effectiveness and personal response are rewarded even when candidates struggle with analytical language. Listing of devices, lengthy or uncommented quotations, paraphrase or storytelling are features of less successful responses. The bullet points can help candidates to keep their focus on the writing and its effects. The final bullet point often addresses the way in which a text ends, which can assist in writing concluding comments on the structure, meaning and lingering impact of a piece of writing.

There were weaker answers that displayed restricted understanding of the texts, often because not all the images of the poem, or different stages of the narrative, had been carefully considered. There was an increase in answers where candidates had constructed a narrative or symbolic meaning for the poem, and occasionally for the passage, which could not be substantiated from the text. Careful reading of the rubric, question and bullet points, a little planning and effective annotation of the text can avoid these problems.

### **Comments on Specific Questions**

#### **Question 1**

The poem "Hit!" by Pete Morgan was a popular choice for candidates and generally prompted lively and personally engaged responses. Very few candidates were unable to at least begin to grasp how Morgan conveys the experience of raising his hand to the son, and his realisation that he is becoming like his own father. Differentiation stemmed from the candidates' ability to respond in an analytical fashion to such elements as the power of diction, the effectiveness of the couplet verse form and the gradual revelation of the reasons for the poet's horror at his action. The bullet points invited the candidates to work their way through the "narrative" of the poem, whilst at the same time responding to the ways in which the poet vividly presents the nightmare reaction of replaying the incident all night in his head. The extended comparison between his own hand and his father's increases in power as the poem continues, culminating in his own painful memories of rejection and hurt; his recognition that he is behaving as his father did, despite the physical differences between them; and in a memorable, if ambiguous, final couplet centred on a description, perhaps imagined, of the father's grave.

Basic responses tended towards a rather factual or narrative approach. There was a description of how the speaker raises his hand in order to hit his son (many candidates assumed that he does actually hit him), how he thinks about it all night and how he feels he is turning into his father. Some candidates struggled with the meaning and implications of "That hand is not this hand", although such confusion was perhaps not wholly surprising given the speaker's own psychologically tortured recognition of both superficial difference and essential similarity. Less strong responses invariably failed to engage at all with the poem's final sentence.

Good responses commented more fully on *how* the impact of this experience is conveyed as well as showing a clear understanding of the feelings of remorse, guilt and apprehension present in the poem. There was some productive discussion, for instance, of the effects of "re-run / A bitter sequence" with comment both on the distasteful, souring nature of the thought processes at work and the suggestion of the visual quality of the images in the speaker's head, as if a movie tape were being played through. There also tended to be a more developed analysis of the imagery of the two hands and how the speaker's father's rough, clenched and quickly moving fist is contrasted to the thin, delicate hand of the speaker himself. There was some excellent, imaginatively engaged discussion, for example, of "the knuckles white / Where skin is tight against the bone" with comment both on the tension and incipient aggression suggested, and also how the whiteness possibly has connotations of death, of lifelessness, of a lack of soul. Good responses also began to explore the ambiguous line "The fingers probe against the brain" and the nature of the "hurt" alluded to in the seventh stanza, and how these sensations were suggestive of deeply entrenched emotional and psychological trauma as well as of straightforward physical pain.

Strong answers analysed language in depth, sensitivity and detail and evaluated thoughtfully their own personal response to the text. Candidates towards the top of the mark-scheme were able to respond to the impact of the structure of the poem as the poet's hand gradually transforms into that of his father. They commented on the repetition of "That hand is not this hand", followed by "That hand becomes this hand", with the enjambment putting stress on "I know". While less able readers took the words "I grow" in isolation, so failing to register the negative implications of the rest of the sentence, strong responses identified the darkening turn of the poem here and how this is dramatized by the awkward enjambment across the stanzas. Some high-scoring candidates commented on the intensive use of enjambment generally, sometimes suggesting how the strain it places on the reader's following of the syntax of the poem perhaps



mirrors the troubled and restless psyche of the speaker. Others proposed that it suggested the unravelling of images and lines of connection in his head. A number commented, in contrast, on the emphatic brevity of the sentence "My own." One or two particularly sensitive readings observed how such a stress is underscored here by the end-stopped nature of the line. Some others commented on the staccato-like effect of the short, rhyming couplet stanzas perhaps suggesting either the blows of the father or, more subtly still, the concussive "hits" of realisation which the speaker experiences. There were a considerable range of well-focused, interpretative responses to the final, enigmatic image of the grasses on the father's grave. These included observations as to how his behaviour as a father is rewarded by his place of rest (or unrest) lying unkempt and untended, to ideas of a symbolic representation of an unpleasant stirring of an inherited - perhaps genetic - tendency towards violence. Strong candidates are able to access the deeper implications and meaning of texts through their appreciation of nuances of tone, and many here registered a forlorn and melancholy sense of emptiness and futility at the end of the poem, as well as a certain darkly playful irony in the final word "misbehave".

## Question 2

The vast majority of candidates were also able to access at some level the non-fiction prose extract taken from Robert Macfarlane's *The Wild Places*, centred on a night which the author spent, with two friends, on a remote island. The focus of the question was on the sensuous qualities of the writing and the ways in which the writer's appeal to the senses engages the reader, and helps him or her to share the pleasure and beauty of these unusual surroundings.

Basic responses tended to adopt a literal and broadly descriptive approach selecting the main features which the author himself describes such as the sunset and the campfire, and commenting on how he and his friends had an enjoyable and relaxed time. Such analysis as was present tended to have a narrative framework, and there was a marked tendency towards paraphrase with a greater or lesser use of textual illustration. There was, however, usually some recognition of the physical sights of the bay, some comment on the attractiveness of the fire on the beach, and some attempt to appreciate the "glimmering of the water" later in the passage.

Good responses focused more explicitly on the writing itself, and *how* the author creates the effects which he does. Many candidates were alert to the personification of the sea water in the opening paragraph and the connotations of reassurance and safety produced. There was a more detailed engagement here with the writer's use of colour and the beginnings of an exploration of the possible deeper implications of the shifts and changes in colour as the sun goes down, or of the vivid contrast of darkness and light throughout the extract. There was some focus on the sensuous qualities of description such as in the "saltiness" of the samphire, the "almond scent" and "trumpet-shaped flowers" of the honeysuckle, the warmth of the "tepid" night and on the use of simile to describe unusual sights such as the three wading birds advancing "like a team of metal detectors". Many candidates focused more closely on the description of the fire and the deployment of figurative language, noting such elements as the allusion to "sun-flares" and the use of alliteration of "the fire's failing and flaring" to enhance the sense of the play between light and dark. In terms of the final sequence describing the writer's nocturnal swim, many noted how his excitement is initially suggested by the exclamation mark in "Phosphorescence!" Others went on to begin to explore both the child-like, innocent pleasure in pretending to be Merlin "dispensing magic to right and left", and the strangeness of the sensation of his body becoming "unclear" and almost disappearing as a "shape of darkness".

Strong answers explored in detail and with sensitivity the writer's use of figurative language and, in particular, the way this is used to bring nature to life and to suggest its pervasive magic and power. The fire was seen to be an embodiment of this mysterious energy and presence. Some candidates linked the description of the sunset and the sun's "combustion" to the fire's sending of "sun-flares" out into the darkness, hinting at nature's cosmic scale. Others concentrated on the aural effects of the description, the "resin hissed" being suggestive perhaps of an obscure creature attempting to communicate out of the ashes. There was a focus on such words as "popped", "cracked", "tore" and "rushed" to suggest a potent, vital sense of natural energy, one immediately set in contrast with the soothing, tranquil sound of the sea as it "hushed" on the shingle. There was also a close focus on the depiction of light in the final sequence as to manner in which the sea "burned with light" out of the blackness, and how the swimmer moves in a seething storm-like "squall of tangerine light". Reference was made here, and at other points, to the surreal quality of the description at times, and how the writer seems to move as in a dream or a spell-bound trance as if the normal processes of the world and of time had been magically suspended. Deeper implications were explored in response to the writer's presentation of the "luminescence" of nature at a time when the human world is dark and silent, the whole scene being "trimmed with light". The perceived nullification of the speaker's form at the end of the extract was seen by some to be indicative of the prevailing suggestion on the part of the writer of man's insignificance in relation to the ineffable, haunting power and beauty of the natural world. From an avowedly



ecological perspective, others were able to evaluate the ways in which the writing encourages the reader to consider the potential fragility of such a special place of nature, and the manner in which its full beauty requires the human element to be almost absent or submerged.

# LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

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Paper 0486/42

Unseen 42

## Key Messages

- Candidates should be prepared to tackle either poetry or prose, and give time to making a careful choice at the beginning of the exam.
- Planning leads to stronger responses: better answers usually have an overview of the writer's purpose and the candidate's personal response to their reading in their introduction.
- The most effective quotation is brief and embedded within the candidate's answer. It is also followed by comments on the effects of those words or images.
- Stronger responses are usually structured around either the bullet points or the structure of the passage itself, and not around a checklist of literary devices.
- Stronger responses responded with care to the wording of the question, and generally used the bullet points to help them to develop their arguments.

The majority of candidates responded positively to the unseen poetry and prose, this series, with many demonstrating well-developed critical skills. It was clear that many candidates had a real understanding of how writers achieve their effects and they engaged with the unseen work with some relish. There was an encouraging increase in the number of candidates willing to tackle the prose passage rather than the poem.

Short poems are often more difficult and more elusive than they appear, and this year's poetry was quite abstract. Examiners are trained to be open to a wide range of interpretations of tone and mood, but such readings always need to be supported by textual evidence from the poem. First impressions need to be developed through a closer look at each stage of a poem, paying particular attention to its visual images, and thus working out a precise understanding of the meaning of each of them before making them cohere as far as possible. A frequent mistake is to construct a narrative for the poem of the candidate's own invention, and then using quotations to illustrate it, rather than making meaning out of the effects of language and structure.

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Good answers are focused on language and are full of brief quotations with comment on the effect of the writer's choices. Comment on effectiveness and personal response are rewarded even when candidates struggle with analytical language. Listing of devices, lengthy or uncommented quotations, paraphrase or storytelling are features of less successful responses. The bullet points can help candidates to keep their focus on the writing and its effects. The final bullet point often addresses the way in which a text ends, which can assist in writing concluding comments on the structure, meaning and lingering impact of a piece of writing.

There were weaker answers that displayed restricted understanding of the texts, often because not all the images of the poem, or different stages of the narrative, had been carefully considered. There was an increase in answers where candidates had constructed a narrative or symbolic meaning for the poem, and occasionally for the passage, which could not be substantiated from the text. Careful reading of the rubric, question and bullet points, a little planning and effective annotation of the text can avoid these problems.

### **Comments on Specific Questions**

#### **Question 1**

This unusual sonnet by Robert Frost was published in 1928 in *West-Running Brook*, and is an elusive poem which certainly provided a challenge for candidates. Not many recognised the regular patterns of the rhyme scheme, and none identified it as *terza rima*, but most identified patterns of repetition and engaged with the images encountered by the poet on his night-walks. Some thought he might be sleepwalking or dreaming, which are valid interpretations given his choice to use Dante's verse form. Some thought the poem might be related to love, like many sonnets, while others, perhaps more accurately saw it as reflecting problems in love or an absence of love. Those determined to construct a narrative for the poem imagined an encounter with a lover, or thought the persona was a returning war-hero, a homeless man or a murderer, even Jack the Ripper. Less speculative answers were more successful. Some read the tone of the poem as sad, lonely and depressed, which is what most Frost scholars would agree with. Some with equal validity noticed a degree of pride in the poet's claims: he has outwalked the city, faced down the night and refused to explain his purpose. Others felt that the poem is not concerned with 'wrong or right' but simply explores the darker side of life without making judgements.

Good responses, no matter what their overall interpretation, invariably dealt carefully with each thing the poet encounters on his night wanderings, as the bullet points suggested, interpreting the meaning of the rain (which some saw as gloomy and others as a sign of fertile promise), going beyond the light, the sad lane, the watchman, the sound of footsteps, the cry and the clock. Different symbolic readings were valid, if supported by textual evidence. The anaphora of the first five lines could be a boast, or could be indicative of the long and repetitive nature of those night walks. Does the poet defy the watchman, or is he ashamed? If he has secrets, he is not choosing to reveal them. Nevertheless, at times he sounds like a prophet, alert to the cries of the night, if unable or unwilling to involve himself. Alternatively, he could sound abandoned, or trying to escape. Many candidates expressed surprise at the poem's subject matter, but some identified very personally with it.

Stronger answers could hear the rhythm of the poem as it settles into regularity, or noticed the shape of the stanzas and use of rhyme. They brought out the ways in which light stands out in the poem's darkness, or paid attention to the importance of modifiers such as 'furthest' and 'saddest', or the surreal description of the clock as 'unearthly' and 'luminary'. Many thought it must be the moon, not necessarily incorrectly. What is important is that it marks the passing of time, but makes no further judgement, which must be some comment on the poet's own treatment of the night and his night walks in this poem.

There was an appreciation that these images suggested isolation, exposure to the elements and pain. Some felt the poet was guilty or felt guilty about something, or that he had a reason for avoiding human contact. Several explored the contradictions of a cityscape empty of people, apart from the occasional sinister cry. Many explored the idea of being 'acquainted' with the night as a form of friendship or companionship; a few read the 'night' itself as symbolic and connected to dark thoughts and feelings. Some successful answers combined response to the rhythms and sounds of the poem and its concluding couplet with the idea that the poet finds himself increasingly at home with the night, calm and content with this darkness. The rain was sometimes interpreted as tears, or the night as a dark past. One candidate called the poem 'a dark journey of wonder'.

Interpretation of the poem was less significant than the ability to link it to the tone, language and imagery, and to justify an interpretation by relating it to the subtle movements within and between stanzas. The lines are initially heavily end-stopped to accentuate the poet's isolation and sense of disconnection. Later meanings and images run on over line-endings and stanza divisions, to suggest that his thoughts and images become more closely linked and more confident. The poet is not only alone but unseen, which may be a metaphor for his own craft. Cries and disturbances are reorganised into patterns and routines, which don't need to be 'wrong or right'. Stronger candidates felt liberated by the poem's lack of clear definition to find their own points of connection with its mood and atmosphere.

Time in the poem, like other objects, seems more real than its people, and is the only light in the darkness. There were many readings of the 'unearthly' nature of it and its proclamation. Although the poem seems cyclical and the final line repeats both the first and the title, it does not necessarily say the same thing in the same tone. While some were disappointed that the ending of the poem offered no revelation or clear resolution of its meaning, as might have been expected from the rhyming couplet of a sonnet, other noticed that the tone is influenced by the preceding lines, just as the tone of the first line is determined by the anaphora which follows. There does seem to be greater confidence here, or a sense of finality. Some noticed the perfect tense, and suggested that the poet could now move beyond the experience of the night. 'He has no sense of time or moral condemnation' but his night vision, a personal *Inferno* perhaps, has become part of his experience.

Those who achieved higher marks showed sensitivity to the poet's exploitation of contrasts: darkness and light, silence and sound, movement and stillness. Some wrote about the sense of distance and space that was created in the poem with the 'furthest' light and the sound of the cry, reaching the persona from 'over houses'; or the moon/clock beaming from an 'unearthly height'. Good candidates noticed that the poet was experiencing a state of acute attentiveness with references to both watching and listening. Few candidates recognised the prophetic tone implied by the proclaiming clock, although there were some valiant attempts to discuss 'time' as a theme; not always successfully.

Some candidates seemed unprepared for the challenges of an unseen poem and they were unable to do more than write in very general terms about a man who went out walking in the rain, got wet, and headed back. Well-prepared candidates knew that they should be alert to certain features of poetry: to rhyme, rhythm, personification, sibilance, assonance, anaphora. Only the better of these candidates were able to explain the effects created by the use of these devices. Many candidates worked their way through the poem in a methodical way, but better candidates did not start to write before beginning to form an overall interpretation of the meaning or mood of the text.

## Question 2

Many of the stronger answers this session were responses to the prose, an extract from close to the beginning of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847). It was impressive to see that they were undaunted by the text's language and complex syntax, but were able to engage with the first-person narrative, the strong descriptive writing, the element of characterisation when the servants arrive, and the suggestions of horror or of avenging ghosts. Most clearly understood that the 'ghost' is a product of the child's fevered imagination, and many appreciated in detail the feelings of anger, guilt, vulnerability and lack of love which leads her to mistake a lantern for a ghostly glimmer, and sympathised with the way she scares herself. Surprisingly few noted that an older narrator is looking back on the feelings of her younger and more naïve self throughout this passage. This was one of several ways in which candidates showed they had not read through the whole passage carefully enough before writing their response. Many also spent too long on the first paragraph and did not spend enough time analysing the climactic passage of the writing, as the young girl's thoughts and emotions conjure up the apparition, although most had something to say about Bessie and Abbot.

Nevertheless, most candidates were able to say something interesting about the girl's thoughts while trapped in the Red Room. They were able to sympathise with her distress and isolation, and understood its origins. Some found symbolic significance in the colour of the room, and many noticed that the descriptions and images become increasingly Gothic. A few were confused by this and thought the events took place in the church or in the vaulted tomb of Mr Reed, while some thought Mr Reed's body was still in the room. Most appreciated that Jane's confinement and unfair treatment has caused her to 'overthink', imagining what isn't there alongside some quite justifiable griefs and torments.

It was especially important in this question to move beyond paraphrase and illustrative quotation. While there are marks for knowledge and understanding of what is going on, higher marks are awarded for understanding of implicit meaning, for exploration of the writer's language and for personal response to the mood of the writing. Candidates who struggle to express themselves analytically might gain more marks by responding to the ways in which the choice of words suggests the emotional world of the text, and the reasons why Jane is upset enough to hallucinate. Stronger scripts immediately spotted ways in which personification gives life to the room in phrases such as 'daylight began to forsake me' to suggest Jane's hyper-sensitivity and ability to imagine that everything is against her. The diction and imagery that describe the wind and rain not only suggest that she is guilty of the pathetic fallacy, but suggest that every element has begun to imitate her griefs and moans. In this atmosphere, it is not surprising that her fears come to life.

Many misunderstood the purpose of the ghost and thought it had come to punish or harm Jane, rather than being a creation of her imagination which she has summoned to comfort her by punishing Mrs Reed for her neglect. However, most understood that the girl is rational enough to see why Mrs Reed might not welcome an 'uncongenial alien' in her house, at the same time as she is distressed enough to think of death and the coldness of the grave. Most saw that her distressed mood had become 'habitual' and that her imprisonment in the Red Room brings these emotions to a climax.

Stronger scripts were distinguished by their ability to sustain the same level of analysis and engagement in the second paragraph as the first. They showed the structural understanding which appreciated that the writing develops towards a climax which, as it largely forms within the narrator's own head, collapses into anti-climax at the entry of the two servants and in the dialogue with which the passage concludes. It was important to separate out the descriptions of the narrator's mood, and her 'fears and imaginings', as the bullet points suggested, in order to be sure about what was really happening, and what only occurs in her own fevered imagination. The 'white bed' is clearly real and significant as it was the bed Mr Reed died on, and therefore prompts images of an avenging spirit, a 'preternatural voice', a 'haloed face' which Jane is not actually frightened of. Indeed it would give her a friend or ally. The halo, and the 'rushing of wings' suggests that what she wants to see is an angel rather than a ghost, something very few candidates were sensitive to.

The Gothic imagery of sunset, the vault, and the intimations of mortality were often understood, and linked to Jane's changing moods and emotional insecurity. Her guilt was understood alongside her anger, with some appreciation about how both emotions might conjure up the 'ghost'. More rare was close analysis of the prose in the second paragraph. The syntax becomes increasingly convoluted to mirror Jane's muddled thoughts, with the use of dashes instead of conventional and controlled punctuation. The repetition of 'I endeavoured...I endeavoured' mimics Jane's vain attempt to assert some self-control, while the rhetorical questions showed her questioning her own perceptions, no longer sure what was real and what was imagined. Strong responses paid attention to the moonlight, and the ways in which the language of the narrative invests it with life, turning a 'streak of light' into 'some coming vision from another world'. As the climactic moment of the passage, this should have received more detailed attention, in response to the second bullet point. The short phrases: 'my heart beat thick, my head grew hot; a sound filled my ears' and the tricolon of 'I was oppressed, suffocated: endurance broke down' brings the girl's breathless panic to life for the reader. It is as important in prose as poetry to pay attention to structure and form, and a closer look at syntax and sentences can help to achieve this.

Most candidates are comfortable with dialogue and were able to pick up marks by looking at Bessie and Abbot, so response to the third bullet point was good. More sophisticated responses were alert to the fact that they offer two different interpretations of Jane's behaviour: she might be ill or acting up. Most sympathised with the narrative voice, as we are meant to, and felt Abbot's lack of sympathy was further proof that Jane was right to feel unloved. Most realised that Bessie's response was very different, although a few noticed that the phrase 'and she did not snatch it from me' suggests she is not always so kind either. It was encouraging to see how well candidates responded to the challenges and conventions of nineteenth-century fiction and found the different social relations, reader expectations and linguistic demand no barrier to engagement with the emotions expressed through the narrative.

# LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

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Paper 0486/43

Unseen 43

## Key Messages

- Candidates should be prepared to tackle either poetry or prose, and give time to making a careful choice at the beginning of the exam.
- Planning leads to stronger responses: better answers usually have an overview of the writer's purpose and the candidate's personal response to their reading in their introduction.
- The most effective quotation is brief and embedded within the candidate's answer. It is also followed by comments on the effects of those words or images.
- Stronger responses are usually structured around either the bullet points or the structure of the passage itself, and not around a checklist of literary devices.
- Stronger responses responded with care to the wording of the question, and generally used the bullet points to help them to develop their arguments.

The majority of candidates responded positively to the unseen poetry and prose, this series, with many demonstrating well-developed critical skills. It was clear that many candidates had a real understanding of how writers achieve their effects and they engaged with the unseen work with some relish. There was an encouraging increase in the number of candidates willing to tackle the prose passage rather than the poem.

Short poems are often more difficult and more elusive than they appear, and this year's poetry was quite abstract. Examiners are trained to be open to a wide range of interpretations of tone and mood, but such readings always need to be supported by textual evidence from the poem. First impressions need to be developed through a closer look at each stage of a poem, paying particular attention to its visual images, and thus working out a precise understanding of the meaning of each of them before making them cohere as far as possible. A frequent mistake is to construct a narrative for the poem of the candidate's own invention, and then using quotations to illustrate it, rather than making meaning out of the effects of language and structure.

Prose passages, in contrast, generally do give a clear narrative for candidates to structure their responses around. However, for anything other than modest marks, it is important that response goes beyond a paraphrase with textual support and begins to explore the writer's language and its effects. A good start is to consider the genre of the piece of writing: what kind of text is it? What kind of reaction does the writer want from her or his audience? How does the language of the writing correspond to that genre? What kind of tension or climax does that kind of writing require? The rubric before the question will help: it does tell candidates whether the passage is fiction, non-fictional autobiography or travel writing, and whether it is at the beginning or end of a novel or short story. This should assist in appreciating the purpose of the writing.

Prose writing can contain as much imagery as verse: candidates should be encouraged to highlight question papers and to draw out unusual words and figurative language. Such language does not merely illustrate the story. It is intended to have an effect on the way the reader sees and feels about the narrative of the prose or poem. Key terms are all the literary terms which describe how we see objects through comparison, or hear rhythms and sounds whether in poetry and prose. Language which appeals to the senses changes the feelings of the reader, contributing to the mood of the writing. The tone of the writing also influences the reader's reaction, and is produced by the sounds and contrasts of the language.

Good answers are focused on language and are full of brief quotations with comment on the effect of the writer's choices. Comment on effectiveness and personal response are rewarded even when candidates struggle with analytical language. Listing of devices, lengthy or uncommented quotations, paraphrase or storytelling are features of less successful responses. The bullet points can help candidates to keep their focus on the writing and its effects. The final bullet point often addresses the way in which a text ends, which



can assist in writing concluding comments on the structure, meaning and lingering impact of a piece of writing.

There were weaker answers that displayed restricted understanding of the texts, often because not all the images of the poem, or different stages of the narrative, had been carefully considered. There was an increase in answers where candidates had constructed a narrative or symbolic meaning for the poem, and occasionally for the passage, which could not be substantiated from the text. Careful reading of the rubric, question and bullet points, a little planning and effective annotation of the text can avoid these problems.

## **Comments on Specific Questions**

### **Question 1**

Grace Nichols's poem 'Blackout' describes her return to her native land of Guyana. It is a powerful and memorable poem but the poet's attitude to what she describes is elusive and ambiguous, and critics have argued about its racial and social politics. There is clearly a postcolonial subtext, but above all it is highly descriptive and personal, sometimes close to satirising 'thirdworld' differences and sometimes celebrating them. The tone and mood of the poem is therefore for readers to discover, and the emphasis of the question was very much on the writer's descriptions and how they provoke a personal response to the world they describe. Candidates found a great deal to write about; those who did not structure their responses well often spent too long on the first three stanzas and did not leave enough time for the way the poem ends. Many realised that the contrast between darkness and light is central to each stanza, and while many images describe the inconvenience of darkness, others celebrate it, in contrast to the harsh white light cast from outside. Only a few realised that this may be a celebration of sensuousness and difference. A more common interpretation emphasised the chaos of the blackout, and the way it changes human behaviour.

Such an ambiguous poem inevitably provoked a wide range of readings. Examiners reported that they enjoyed the candidates' interpretations as they were so varied. Many wanted to interpret the politics of development or believed the poem was an environmental statement or, anachronistically, a comment on our over-dependency on digital communication and digital games. The best focused upon the gap between rich and poor, contemporary and medieval, developed and undeveloped economies. There was some creative and interesting thought about the poet's attitude to the darkness, which seems to change as the poem progresses. Increasingly she welcomes the variety and richness of 'things coming into being', and to condemn the artificial light of the 'big houses'. Some stronger candidates developed the metaphors of cinema which are implicit throughout the poem – some picking up horror movie imagery in the first stanza – and which is explicit in the final, isolated line. This technique of reading the poem through an interpretation of the final line can be highly successful: certainly such readings showed the ability to construct a unified view of the text, and yielded insight into its structure as well as its meaning. Other forms of overall interpretation, which try to force a reading onto the poem without letting it emerge from details in the text, or which read individual lines or images in isolation without regards to their place in the text, were much less successful.

An accurate reading of the poem should have been assisted by both the rubric and the footnotes: the poet is clearly not a complete outsider, or entirely alienated by what she sees. Questions and bullet points will always reveal the gender of the poet to avoid any confusion on that score. 'Endemic' does not mean the same as 'epidemic', so it is not correct to think that 'darkness is feared like a deadly disease'. The word 'footfall' caused problems, as candidates are over-eager to read it as 'football' and there were some entertaining but misguided responses to the difficulties of playing football in the dark. Stronger answers showed more careful reading and took each of the poet's visual images in turn, as if a camera were reeling and, from an individual standpoint but quite objectively, recording what it sees.

There was sensitive reading of the people's evolution into 'bats' which adapt to their environment, and some noticed the sibilance of these lines to invoke their 'sonic ways'. Creative readings of difficult lines included 'Out of the shadows, into the light of their own flesh' is a rather confusing turn of phrase, describing, perhaps, people finding comfort in others.' This exploratory approach to detail can be developed into broader interpretation by working on its implications for later parts of the poem, such as the descriptions of the children and young girls. Some noticed that other senses have become heightened in the absence of artificial light, or that alternative sources of light or enlightenment are beginning to emerge. A few candidates felt, quite plausibly, that the whole idea of the 'Blackout' was actually a metaphor for the state and history of 'the land'.

The second stanza is more realistic, even though it explicitly introduces the movie metaphor. The scene is identified as 'thirdworld' and there is a contrast between those who have sources of light and those who do

not. Some candidates included their own responses to blackouts or experiences of less developed countries, which was appropriate if linked to the words of the text. The phrase 'snug relief' is interesting and was often misunderstood. The noun is more likely to be an artistic one, related to 'painted' and 'blending', and the adjective is an early suggestion that there is also comfort in this chaos, and that the white and grey, the fresh and the ramshackle, are brought together in these images.

It was perhaps inevitable that the children received most attention from candidates, who were quick to identify the ways in which they flitted about the television like moths about a light, even though that light was out. There were strong readings of the media as an 'electric-spell' offering magical but artificial enlightenment. Comparatively few went on to ask why the movie had to feature 'America', or why the poet chose the verb 'trigger', although both suggest a great deal about the cultural influences that exert a magical pull on the children. Several realised that the blackout made very little difference if the movie 'played out endlessly in their heads'.

Comments on the coconut vendors were more varied: some misread the word 'cutlassed', despite the footnote, and thought they were pirates, and one thought they were cutting off the heads of white husky dogs. Better answers picked up the hints of violence in the diction here, or contrasted these 'medieval' images with the technology of the previous stanza. One or two commented on the coconuts themselves, which once 'cutlassed' reveal bright white insides. Not many understood that this is a typical Caribbean scene, and it is important that candidates preparing for this paper read texts from a wide range of English-speaking contexts in order not to be misled by the unfamiliar.

Readings of the penultimate stanza were more successful, if candidates had worked out their interpretations of the final line, and therefore decided how to read the whole poem. There is a series of visual images contrasting dark place such as the 'sudden dim horizontal of an alleyway' with light which, coming from the big houses with their own generators, is offensively and painfully bright. Quite a number of candidates thought the girls must be prostitutes, and picked up the more 'questionable' and fearful aspects of the town at night. Far fewer picked up the suggestion that 'flittings' are becoming incarnate in a night which is an 'act of faith'. However, quite a number realised that the movie might be 'worn-out' from repetition, but the 'endless cinema of the skies' has a peculiar beauty that the poem celebrates. Examiners of this paper are very open to a wide variety of personal responses, and will reward interpretations and reading which are supported by accurate understanding of the words of the text, their connotations and the tone and rhythms of the writing.

## Question 2

The prose passage was the opening pages of Christopher Isherwood's *Mr Norris Changes Trains* (1935), the first of his Berlin novels and an introduction to the characters of both Mr Norris and the semi-autobiographical narrator, William Bradshaw. The setting is Germany between the world wars. Candidates were told that this was the opening of a novel, and it might have helped to produce better answers if they had given thought about what writers want to achieve in their early pages: an interesting setting and relationship, some mystery and intrigue, and strong or unusual characters. We are not only introduced to the strange and contradictory Mr Norris but also to the acutely observant and curious narrator, with a cold but intense gaze at the details of other people's lives. We do not expect mysteries and oddities at the beginning of a novel to be resolved. At this stage we do not know why Mr Norris is agitated or angry about frontiers, or what bothers him about them, or quite how the relationship between the two men will develop, although a degree of trust and friendliness is already established here, despite the 'exaggerated politeness' and cautious charm. The interest should also lie in the unusual language (and surprising comparisons), used by the narrator, which they make the writing striking and memorable.

This question was probably more popular than the poetry, but seemed to produce fewer very strong answers as well as fewer weak ones. Most understood what was happening and were able to support their answers with long quotations, and often with identification of the writer's techniques, but there was not enough focused comment on their specific effect. Candidates were keen to speculate on Mr Norris's business: some thought he was autistic or a drug dealer, a few a terrorist, and many (more accurately) a bit of a crook. This was not necessarily a problem, but it could be a distraction if they spent too much time trying to bend the words of the text to fit their theory. Most realised that the stranger looked unusual, had some odd mannerisms and behaved peculiarly towards the narrator, especially when asked a question, but they struggled to pinpoint exactly what was intriguing about him. There were too many repetitive or circular responses, such as 'The writer makes the stranger such an intriguing character because he describes his unusual appearance and movements, which are very intriguing to the reader'.

A more successful approach was to use the bullet points to structure a response to details and developments in the writing. What is striking about the stranger's eyes is not that they are blue, although that seemed odd enough to many candidates for this paper, but that they were 'unusually light' and 'vacant': he seems at the same time both innocent and 'naughty' and his eyes do not give much away. The narrator continues to focus on contradictions and suspicious behaviour throughout his description. The stranger certainly seems to be nervous about something. One or two stronger answers gave reasons why he might be right to be nervous under the remorseless gaze of the narrator. The narrator speculates that 'perhaps he imagined that I could read' his thoughts, and indeed he looks at him so closely that he nearly does so. But our understanding of Mr Norris's thoughts is limited to what the narrator can observe, and it is the narrator who quickly links him to criminal or illicit behaviour. The stranger is a naughty schoolboy 'surprised in the act', who starts 'violently', recoiling as if at a gunshot. The narrator himself takes an instinctive backward step, as if they were at a shoot-out rather than in a railway carriage.

Good answers saw that these suggestions of anxiety and the threat of violence are maintained throughout, as if they are at a wilder frontier than they really are. For example, his nervous fingers seem about 'to draw a revolver' and he remains 'doubtful' of his fellow traveller. However, this needed to be balanced by their superficial politeness: the narrator calls him 'sir', both are 'ready to be apologetic', and, faced with the prospect of seven or eight hours in the same compartment, that politeness soon yields to a more friendly confidence. Although at first the stranger seems suspicious of the narrator and his determination to talk, agitation passed 'like a little cloud' to suggest that they become more at ease with each other. Plenty of candidates noticed his teeth 'like broken rocks' and wondered why a man in an 'expensive-looking' suit with manicured hands did not pay to get his teeth fixed. Quite a few legitimately wondered if there was something fake or fraudulent about the stranger's external appearance, and suspected his rotten and ugly teeth might be a metaphor for something rotten in him, behind the surface charm. Nevertheless, good scripts acknowledged that the narrator saw him as charming, their dialogue is polite, and his behaviour elaborate and delicate. Their mutual smiles show them overcoming their doubts and beginning to establish a tentative connection and friendship.

The key to analysis of the developing relationship between the two men, as suggested by the second bullet point, was the simile of the lighter's flickering flame. More extended analysis of the figurative language here was essential in order to move beyond a narrative response, and fewer candidates were as confident in exploring these implications as the more superficial and straightforward matter of the stranger's appearance. The lighting of the cigarettes begins a fleeting intimacy, which would be easily 'extinguished' by an 'incautious gesture or word'. Trust is developing but every word and gesture remains careful. Whatever the stranger's hidden guilt, he behaves as if he thinks the *narrator* might be a thief or a crook. This is a setting where strangers are superficially polite but also deeply nervous of each other. Could this be because of the proximity of the 'frontier'? Clearly crossing into Germany means something to Mr Norris, even if the narrator seems quite undaunted by it. The lighter simile is followed by short, terse sentences which maintain the tension until the narrator asks his final question.

Good answers showed awareness of the difference between the stranger's two answers, one of them polite and apparently non-committal but uttered 'with caution', and the other showing 'surprising petulance' and a degree of personal grievance about 'these frontiers'. Why does he react as if teased by a 'wasp'? Has he been stung in the past, or is he afraid of being caught? The final paragraph achieves the writer's purpose of heightening the tension and suspense without alleviating it by making a simple revelation. Candidates were most successful when they respected that lack of resolution and were content to remain uncertain about the stranger's identity and past. There was plenty to say about his slow-motion movement and the analogy of a game of poker, in which players of course try to reveal as little as possible about what kind of hand they are concealing. Timing was not usually a problem for candidates, who had little difficulty in writing about all stages of this quite lengthy passage, but the key discriminator was the ability to explore figurative language with sensitivity to tone, and awareness of the implications of detail.

# LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

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Paper 0486/05  
Coursework

## Key messages

Task set must enable candidates to produce work which meets the requirements of the higher bands.

Teacher should annotate each assignment carefully in order to provide a rationale for the awarding of a particular mark.

The requirements of the syllabus should be noted towards the beginning of the IGCSE course, so that there is time for the Centre to remedy errors and omissions.

## General comments

The strongest folders contained work which demonstrated a sustained engagement with the texts studied and tasks set. It was pleasing to see in a number of Centres the high degree of candidate choice, both in the selection of texts and the framing of coursework tasks. Most Centres complied with the syllabus requirements, noting the need to explore two poems and two stories in poetry and short story assignments respectively. It should be remembered that the syllabus requires a response to the whole text, and that an exclusive focus on a chapter of a novel or a scene in a play is not permitted.

In the rare cases where texts were set which lacked the level of demand required for IGCSE Level, this was noted in the Report to the Centre. The most common texts this session included *Songs of Ourselves*, *Stories of Ourselves*, *An Inspector Calls*, *The Tempest*, *Of Mice and Men* and *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*.

The strongest critical essays provided sustained perceptive analysis of the ways in which writers achieve their effects. The tasks candidates were responding to had been worded in such a way that candidates were explicitly directed to explore the writing. A task which focuses on Shakespeare's *presentation* of Shylock as a cruel man is in this regard more useful to candidates than a question which asks 'Is Shylock treated fairly?' This last question does not explicitly invite exploration of Shakespeare's writing; rather it regards Shylock as a real-life character. Sometimes only a little re-wording can refine the focus of a task in order to give a clear sense of direction to candidates. The task 'How does Marner change during the course of the novel?' invites a descriptive approach. A revised, more effective task might explicitly direct candidates to explore the qualities of the writing: e.g. 'How does Eliot portray the change in Marner's character as the novel progresses?'

Occasionally extraneous background material detracted from an analysis of the text, or to the question. Too often context took the form of background material introduced without regard to the wording of the actual text. This unhelpful approach was evident in some essays on Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*.

Most assignments submitted this session bore evidence of teacher annotation. At its most useful, the annotation takes the form of:

- focused ticking in the body of the assignment
- concise marginal comments pointing to strengths and weaknesses
- summative comments (at the end of essays or on the individual record card) drawing upon the wording of the band descriptors.

Taken together, these types of annotation serve to provide a rationale for the Centre's award of a particular mark and assist the moderation process greatly. By contrast, clean copies of assignments do not.