

# LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

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Paper 0486/05  
Coursework

## **Key messages**

1. Teachers should check the tasks they set against the examples of effective tasks given in the *Coursework Training Handbook*.
2. Teachers should annotate each assignment carefully in order to provide justification for the award of a particular mark.
3. Where there is more than one teacher in a Centre, there should be evidence of internal moderation with explanations provided for any adjustments made to marks.
4. Teachers should check the completeness and accuracy of all paperwork before they submit it to Cambridge for external moderation.
5. Planning and the writing of first drafts should be completed under direct teacher supervision so that the Centre can vouch for the authenticity of candidates' own work.

## **General comments**

In addition to this report, Centres will receive individual reports on their internal moderation of candidate work. This general report draws together the main points contained within the Centre reports. The component had fewer entries in November than in June 2016; Centres new to the syllabus should refer to the June 2016 report for the more detailed guidance contained therein.

Most of the tasks set allowed candidates to meet the relevant band descriptors. However, there was some evidence of tasks that did not target the descriptors in the higher bands. For candidates to reach the higher bands in Critical Essay assignments, tasks should be set that enable focus on writers' use of language, structure and form. Examples of appropriate tasks can be found in both the *Coursework Training Handbook* and in the general essay questions set in 0486 Set Texts examination papers. Tasks which omit any mention of the writer lead candidates to write about characters as real-life people rather than fictional creations and provide no direction to explore the qualities of the writing; this approach is unlikely to meet the higher band descriptors and should be avoided through the careful wording of set tasks.

Centres should not submit work if they are aware that it contains plagiarism. To avoid occurrences of plagiarism, teachers must be rigorous in their supervision of the stages of planning and writing of first drafts. This will enable them to vouch for the authenticity of candidate's work. Moderators are required to send all cases of suspected malpractice to Cambridge International Examinations' Compliance Department for further investigation.

Effective moderation of written assignments relies on effective annotation of candidate work by teachers. Summative comments which draw on the wording of the descriptors and focused ticking of valid and thoughtful points together offer the Moderator a rationale for the award of a particular mark. It follows that clean copies of assignments (i.e. those devoid of teacher annotation) are of limited use to the moderation process.

A staple or treasury tag properly applied can readily secure a candidate's two written pieces and the individual record card in a way that provides ease of access to the Moderator. Plastic covers and card files are not helpful in this regard. Further guidance on appropriate administration and the submission of coursework samples can be found in the *Teacher Guide*.

Finally, the majority of Centres are to be congratulated on the robustness of their administration, as they recognise the central importance to their candidates of the proper completion of forms and the careful transcription of marks from assignments to record cards and mark sheets. Where there are serious deficiencies and/or lack of rigour in a coursework submission, the Centre may be asked to follow one of the other two optional routes through the syllabus, which are 100 per cent externally assessed.

# 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:

- giving unneeded extraneous biographical information
- commenting on how the use of punctuation exclusively adds to the mood and tone of a poem
- describing rhyme schemes and verse forms without showing their function
- answering the general essay question on a text solely by reference to the extract
- treating a poem or passage as an Unseen exercise.

Success will come from:

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

## General comments

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 most accomplished answers were full of well supported personal responses to the questions and showed sensitivity to the writers' methods and intentions.

Most candidates demonstrated knowledge and understanding of their texts, and as usual there were some strong answers to questions. What characterised these good responses was an ability to focus clearly on the terms of the question, and to direct relevant material, supporting it with succinct reference to, and often direct quotation from, the text concerned. Exploration of writers' use of language, and analysis of this, particularly in response to poetry answers, was the hallmark of a high-band answer.

The performance of some candidates was limited by their lack of focus on the terms of the question, and candidates might well be advised to think more carefully about what a question is asking, and plan out a response more carefully, before setting out to respond. 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 and it was good to see that in many cases this advice had been noted and acted upon. Some candidates limited themselves by offering a narrow range of material which they repeated, sometimes several times, during their response. The intensifiers in the question, the words such as 'vividly', 'dramatically', 'memorably', were still neglected as was apparent from the lack of response to the quality of the writing. Many candidates did continually refer back to the question, focusing on the key words, for example, 'moving', 'joy' and 'create drama', which helped them provide answers which addressed the question.

Long quotations, or listing key words and labelling them a 'semantic field', is description and not analysis. Recognition of literary devices such as similes and alliteration does not by itself constitute analysis. Describing rhyme schemes and verse forms is rarely particularly relevant to the question. The use of phrases

such as 'positive' or 'negative connotations' communicates very little and there was an increase in the use of imprecise slang expressions such as 'positive vibe' and 'zoned out'. Precise comments on the effects created are essential in order to make useful points and they are the sign of a good answer. 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.

Though not as significant a number as in the previous series, there were still examples of essay questions being answered by candidates using exclusively the material in the printed passage. Candidates need to remember that there is a choice of questions on each text and that the second one is a standalone general essay question. The passage is 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 involved is always going to be at best self-limiting, since it does not offer enough material for a general discursive answer.

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 their own sentences. Excessively long quotations can at most 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 understanding or of commentary.

For a long time the passage-based questions have been significantly more popular than the discursive ones, and this continued to be the pattern though there were some pleasing responses to the general questions on some of the novels, in particular *No Longer at Ease* and *Silas Marner*. Those candidates who did attempt the general questions often achieved highly because of the quality of their engagement with the text and the persuasiveness of their arguments, though they were sometimes over-reliant on generalisations and could have benefited from even just a little more specific reference. In the passage-based questions a lot of responses did not look closely enough at the effect on the reader who, surely, must be the obvious focus. Candidates need to give more consideration to what makes them smile, laugh, feel empathy / sympathy or even feel disturbed and then look for the evidence within the passage.

There was still a good deal of evidence that candidates were using the passage-based questions as 'Unseen' exercises; particularly the poetry questions where lack of understanding rapidly revealed itself. Similarly with the prose extracts, a lack of knowledge of the context quickly became apparent. The words 'at this moment in the novel' or variants of them are a signal to candidates that they need to use the wider context to support their ideas. Answers which limit themselves entirely to the extracts will probably not achieve particularly highly. There is no escaping the fact that candidates need to know the texts in detail.

There were very few rubric errors made this series, 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.

### **Comments on specific questions**

#### **Section A: Poetry**

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

##### **Question 1**

Explore the ways in which Hardy's writing creates such moving effects in *The Pine Planters*.

This was the less popular of the two Hardy questions, and was rarely handled in a particularly developed manner. A minority of candidates knew the literary context of the poem. This helped in locating and identifying moving elements in the poem, although many failed to move beyond a narrative approach. A few began to explore the seed/tree image. Those who did not recall the literary context struggled to impose a thematic significance on the poem, almost always ignoring or giving scant attention to 'moving'. Some candidates seemed to find the length of the poem daunting, and in some cases, the second part was not addressed.

##### **Question 2**

Explore the ways in which Hardy makes *Neutral Tones* such a sad poem.

Most candidates were able to find something to say about Hardy's description of winter, sun, leaves, and in many cases took the opportunity to mention pathetic fallacy. However, relatively few went on to try to link their observations to the terms of the question. For many, it appeared that being 'neutral' was the same as being 'sad'. One key discriminator was the extent to which the image of the dead smile was understood. There were some developed responses which made fruitful use of well selected textual reference to demonstrate how the sadness of the poem is created, but they were rare.

**From JO PHILLIPS ed: *Poems Deep & Dangerous***

**Question 3**

How does Lochhead create vivid impressions of the speaker and her sister in *Poem for My Sister*?

This was one of the most popular questions in this section of the paper, and was frequently well handled. Most candidates identified the extended metaphor and understood what it signified, and the images of hopscotch and calloused feet were also dealt with well in many instances. Candidates often wrote more convincingly about the older sister than her younger sibling, for example mis-ascribing the admiration in the first stanza to the older girl rather than seeing the twelve-year old's self-regard. Discrimination arose from the extent to which candidates explored the language of the poem to demonstrate the creation of 'vivid' expressions.

**Question 4**

In what ways does Arnold movingly convey the speaker's sadness in *To Marguerite*?

Although less popular than the Lochhead alternative, there were plenty of takers for this question too. Most demonstrated a reasonable understanding of the imagery of isolation and separation. Some became side-tracked into pseudo-biography of Arnold and his lost love Marguerite, or the religious crisis in nineteenth century England, but more developed answers moved beyond a general account of the poem to focus on sadness, often couched in terms of sympathy for the speaker and his perceived loss of faith. The most accomplished answers explored the poem's language and imagery in some depth.

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

**Question 5**

How does Raine vividly convey the speaker's changing feelings in *Passion*?

Many candidates tackled this question with some success. Most showed some sympathy for the persona and identified some of the changing feelings expressed, although a minority asserted that the speaker was selfish and annoying and needed to 'get a grip'. As always, the more confident responses explored the language of the poem, engaging closely with the imagery and recognising how this reflected the changing feelings, often indicating that an 'epiphany' had occurred. Some candidates blurred distinctions between emotional responses and thought processes.

**Question 6**

How does Chitre create a moving portrayal of old age in *Father Returning Home*?

This was the most popular question in the poetry section of the paper. Nearly all candidates were able to identify details in the poem which demonstrated that the father in the poem was an old man - grey hair, poor eyesight, trembling hands – and that he behaved as one by drinking weak tea and listening to the radio and showing little concern about his appearance. One key differentiator with this question was whether candidates were able to go beyond this descriptive approach to consider what made this 'moving'. Some took the term to mean 'in motion', with self-limiting consequences. Such candidates were able to refer to the old man's journey home, and to his progress across the station platform, but such a literal approach left large tracts of the poem out of consideration. Candidates who moved beyond a descriptive or explanatory approach to engage with images such as the 'word dropped from a long sentence' generally fared rather better overall, but few commented on the role of the speaker or the comparative lack of feeling in the poem.

**Section B: Prose**

**CHINUA ACHEBE: *No Longer at Ease***

**Question 7**

How does Achebe vividly convey the tensions between the characters at this moment in the novel?

*No Longer at Ease* was not a particularly popular text in this time zone, but the overwhelming majority of candidates who had studied it opted for this question, and many performed quite well. The tensions between the two women in particular were generally understood, and Clara's behaviour was often interpreted in some detail. What was lacking in many responses was any real probing of the language of the extract, and quite often, the major focus was on the initial conversations between Clara, Miss Mark and Obi, with the latter part of the extract given at best perfunctory treatment. More developed answers often made good comments on the dialogue between the characters, showing a good grasp of the implications of what was said (and what was left unsaid).

**Question 8**

To what extent does Achebe make you feel that Mr Green is an admirable character?

Very few candidates attempted this question, and those who did identified his arrogance and his representative status as a European colonist, without fully linking their observations to the actual wording of the question. There was very little consideration of Achebe's writing in the few answers seen.

**JANE AUSTEN: *Northanger Abbey***

**Question 9**

How does Austen strikingly portray the contrast between John Thorpe and Henry Tilney at this moment in the novel?

Austen is very much a minority taste in this time zone, but those candidates who had studied this text tended to choose the extract question. Most recognised that there is a contrast, and that while John Thorpe is loud and full of himself, Tilney was different. Indeed, pinning down some of the qualities that make Tilney different proved difficult, although some insightful candidates identified his humorous, slightly mocking manner. As so often, the very few who handled this question really well distinguished themselves by engaging closely with Austen's writing.

**Question 10**

Explore **one** moment in the novel where Austen's writing makes a character's actions particularly shocking for you.

Much less popular than the extract based alternative, this question was rarely handled well. There was a very elastic definition of 'moment' in some answers, Catherine's growing disillusion with Isabella being on offer in some answers. Other candidates wrote about characters – usually General Tilney – deemed to be shocking. Where a moment rather than a process or a character was identified, the treatment tended to be heavily narrative, with 'shocking' left to be self-explanatory. Questions such as this, which allow freedom of choice within their chosen texts, provide good opportunities for confident candidates with a good grasp of the whole text, but are probably best avoided by those who see such questions as an invitation to write about what little they can remember of the text under the pressure of examination conditions.

**GEORGE ELIOT: *Silas Marner***

**Question 11**

In what ways does Eliot vividly portray Silas's feelings at this moment in the novel?

Although *Silas Marner* was not a particularly popular text in this time zone, the extract question was among the better handled questions on the paper by those who attempted it. The extract itself is a key moment in the novel, and candidates were generally able to follow the development of Silas's feelings with plenty of textual support and a good awareness of the writer's craft evident in many responses. Even for those who



were working at a narrative level, textual support was generally well selected. There was clear evidence of appreciation of Eliot's writing in many answers to this question.

### Question 12

'Too perfect.'

To what extent does Eliot make you agree with this description of Nancy?

Possibly because the extract question was so accessible, very few candidates opted for this question, and most responses adopted a narrative approach, writing about Nancy generally with little adaptation of material to fit the actual question.

### MICHAEL FRAYN: *Spies*

### Question 13

How does Frayn create such striking impressions of Keith's father at this moment in the novel?

Despite the richness of the extract, there were a number of extraneous responses to this question, often because candidates took the opportunity to write a comparison between Keith's father and Stephen's, perhaps using prepared material. Consequently, much of what such candidates wrote had at best tangential relevance to the question. Those who focused on the passage in the question were able to identify striking impressions, a key differentiator being the extent to which candidates were able to move beyond the young Stephen's awed admiration for a hero and discuss the sinister implications of his true character with some sense of how these are communicated.

### Question 14

'He was the leader and I was the led', says Stephen. To what extent does Frayn convince you that Keith is the leader of the two boys?

Much less popular than the extract question on this text, and generally not particularly well handled. Candidates were able to enumerate the reasons Stephen thought Keith was better than him and to identify some of the ways in which Stephen, at least in his own eyes, demonstrates his inferiority. Any consideration of what constitutes real leadership, as opposed to the imposition of your will on someone else, if necessary by violence, was lacking in all but a handful of answers. There was a reluctance on the part of most candidates to express the judgment invited by the question ('convince you').

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

### Question 15

How does Hill make this a surprising and revealing moment in the novel?

This was among the most popular questions on the whole paper, and was often handled with considerable success. The role reversal between the two boys was grasped by most candidates, and there were many who pointed out the contrast between Kingshaw's behaviour in the ascendancy and that of Hooper. However, there were also many who demonstrated some empathy for Hooper, while acknowledging his general deficiencies; pointing out that this extract made clear that he was, underneath the façade, a small boy. Kingshaw's essential decency was also widely recognised. Candidates were able to provide plentiful textual evidence, a differentiator being the extent to which they went beyond citation to discuss language and effects. Many considered the implications of the extract, with a substantial number indicating that although the incident might have been thought to bode well for the future, in the event it did nothing of the sort.

### Question 16

What impressions does Hill create for you of Kingshaw's life before he moved to Warings?

This was markedly less popular than the extract question, and was generally less well handled. Very few candidates were able to move beyond rather vague generalisations about his unsettled domestic life, and references to his old School, St Vincent's, which are not uncommon in the novel, were very rare in answers. In a number of cases, the word 'before' in the question might as well not have been there, as candidates wrote about Kingshaw's life in general or specifically about his life at Warings.

**R K NARAYAN: *The English Teacher***

**Question 17**

How does Narayan make this conversation so memorable?

This was very much a minority choice of text, and most answers remained resolutely narrative or descriptive. Candidates generally demonstrated some understanding of the text, but there was very little evidence of why it was (or was not) memorable.

**Question 18**

What impressions does Narayan's writing give you of the relationship between Krishna and Susila before her illness?

Far less popular even than **Question 17**. There was plenty of material available to demonstrate the mixture of devotion and spikiness which seems to characterise their early relationship, from the period when they were married but living separately, their search for a house, their devotion to each other, the differences in their personalities, and the quarrel over the disposal of Krishna's clock. However, given the limited appeal of this text to candidates in this time zone, it is perhaps unsurprising that the few who did attempt it opted for the relative security of the extract question.

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

**Question 19**

Explore the ways in which Stevenson conveys Utterson's changing emotions at this moment in the novel.

Responses to this question, which was a popular option, were variable. The characteristic preamble establishing Victorian Gothic conventions, the detective story genre, dualism and the psychology of evil was much in evidence, usually with very little link to the extract or the question. As in **Question 20**, confusion abounded: many candidates thought Guest and Clerk were two different people (a further extension of dualism?). Utterson's motivation was often misunderstood, and a significant minority of candidates thought that he had by this stage realised that Jekyll and Hyde were the same person. The word 'emotion' was used to cover any aspect of human thought and behaviour. What might have helped candidates with this question would have been an 'empathic' approach in which they considered how they might feel about a friend who appeared to be getting himself into deep water with an unpredictable and sinister person, and to realise that this friend was lying to him apparently to help a murderer. This could at least have avoided some of the misunderstanding. That said, there were candidates who negotiated the difficulties of the text and produced some impressive responses which engaged closely with the text and genuinely showed ability to 'explore the ways' of Stevenson's writing.

**Question 20**

How does Stevenson make the effect of Hyde on Dr Lanyon such a powerful part of the novel?

This was another question where responses were sometimes beset by parades of knowledge and theory, not always relevant, about Victorian science and *mores*. There was a good deal of confusion about who Lanyon was, with some candidates thinking he was Enfield or Utterson. Answers where the candidate remembered that Jekyll and Lanyon's friendship had been a meeting of scientific minds, and that the latter's witnessing of Hyde's transformation to Jekyll was the cause of his death, fared rather better, and there were a few assured responses which actually dealt with the 'how' of the question by considering the narrative complexity of the novel, and the way that Lanyon's rapid decline and death is presented as a puzzle for Utterson and the readers. A significant number of less developed answers ran both questions on this text together, the only text on this paper where that was a relatively common occurrence.

**From *Stories of Ourselves***

**Question 21**

How does Desai vividly portray the way in which children think and behave in this extract?



This was another popular option in the prose section of the paper, and the question presented ample opportunities for candidates of a wide range of ability. Candidates who took a narrative approach described the game and the children participating, the liveliness of their narration standing out for the 'vividly' of the question. A frequent misreading was that Mira was actually the mother of the children, rather than 'motherly'. Candidates were generally able to differentiate the characters and to provide some suitable textual support for their comments. More developed responses were able to move beyond surface narration to consider the significance of game playing – a 'business' – and what it revealed about children's competitiveness and fears. Some sophisticated responses began to analyse the ways in which a hierarchy is established among the children through age and physical size/strength.

### **Question 22**

Explore the ways in which Thorpe makes you sympathise with the narrator in *Tyres*.

This was very much the minority choice on this anthology, and was seldom handled particularly effectively. Most candidates understood the context of Cécile's death and asserted that this was sad for the narrator. Some went a little further with their narration, and showed knowledge of the circumstances leading up to this. Very few went on to consider the long-term aftermath of the events, or to consider how that might elicit further sympathy from readers, and there was very little consideration of the writer's technique.

# LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

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Paper 0486/12  
Poetry and Prose 12

## Key messages

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

- giving unneeded extraneous biographical information
- commenting on how the use of punctuation exclusively adds to the mood and tone of a poem
- describing rhyme schemes and verse forms without showing their function
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Success will come from:

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## General comments

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 most accomplished answers were full of well supported personal responses to the questions and showed sensitivity to the writers' methods and intentions.

Most candidates demonstrated knowledge and understanding of their texts, and as usual there were some strong answers to questions. What characterised these good responses was an ability to focus clearly on the terms of the question, and to direct relevant material, supporting it with succinct reference to, and often direct quotation from, the text concerned. Exploration of writers' use of language, and analysis of this, particularly in response to poetry answers, was the hallmark of a high-band answer.

The performance of some candidates was limited by their lack of focus on the terms of the question, and candidates might well be advised to think more carefully about what a question is asking, and plan out a response more carefully, before setting out to respond. 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 and it was good to see that in many cases this advice had been noted and acted upon. Some candidates limited themselves by offering a narrow range of material which they repeated, sometimes several times, during their response. The intensifiers in the question, the words such as 'vividly', 'dramatically', 'memorably', were still neglected as was apparent from the lack of response to the quality of the writing. Many candidates did continually refer back to the question, focusing on the key words, for example, 'moving', 'joy' and 'create drama', which helped them provide answers which addressed the question.

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such as 'positive' or 'negative connotations' communicates very little and there was an increase in the use of imprecise slang expressions such as 'positive vibe' and 'zoned out'. Precise comments on the effects created are essential in order to make useful points and they are the sign of a good answer. 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.

Though not as significant a number as in the previous series, there were still examples of essay questions being answered by candidates using exclusively the material in the printed passage. Candidates need to remember that there is a choice of questions on each text and that the second one is a standalone general essay question. The passage is 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 involved is always going to be at best self-limiting, since it does not offer enough material for a general discursive answer.

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 their own sentences. Excessively long quotations can at most 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 understanding or of commentary.

For a long time the passage-based questions have been significantly more popular than the discursive ones, and this continued to be the pattern though there were some pleasing responses to the general questions on some of the novels, in particular *No Longer at Ease* and *Silas Marner*. Those candidates who did attempt the general questions often achieved highly because of the quality of their engagement with the text and the persuasiveness of their arguments, though they were sometimes over-reliant on generalisations and could have benefited from even just a little more specific reference. In the passage-based questions a lot of responses did not look closely enough at the effect on the reader who, surely, must be the obvious focus. Candidates need to give more consideration to what makes them smile, laugh, feel empathy / sympathy or even feel disturbed and then look for the evidence within the passage.

There was still a good deal of evidence that candidates were using the passage-based questions as 'Unseen' exercises; particularly the poetry questions where lack of understanding rapidly revealed itself. Similarly with the prose extracts, a lack of knowledge of the context quickly became apparent. The words 'at this moment in the novel' or variants of them are a signal to candidates that they need to use the wider context to support their ideas. Answers which limit themselves entirely to the extracts will probably not achieve particularly highly. There is no escaping the fact that candidates need to know the texts in detail.

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### **Comments on specific questions**

#### **Section A: Poetry**

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

##### **Question 1: *I look Into My Glass* and *Nobody Comes***

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

The first poem was usually understood by candidates, though some seemed to take it that Hardy's main feeling of depression resulted solely from his getting old and wasting away. Some missed the point that his emotions remain the same as when he was a young man. In fact few candidates attempted to analyse language or the way the tone of the poem is created by the poet, and this limited the quality of response to this question which asks 'how' feelings are movingly conveyed. Candidates noted accurately enough the loneliness of the speaker in the second poem, though comments on the atmosphere and setting could have been developed further had candidates spent more time on the language and less time making clear what was happening in the poem. Tying the poem to the specific interpretation that it describes Hardy's wait for his wife to return from hospital limited the scope for discussion.

**Question 2: *The Voice***

Many candidates spent more than enough time on biographical and marital background, and less than ideal time on the analysis of the language of the poem. This poem was well enough understood by most who offered it, but better responses went beyond paraphrase and explanation to explore 'the ways' Hardy 'movingly conveys' grief in the poem – in other words they responded to the terms of the question. Some mentioned the dampness and colourlessness of the setting, the reference to wind and rain, and the repetition of questioning which some argued to be the speaker's yearning for the voice to be 'real' and not just an hallucination. However few considered the link between air, breeze and wind, for example, or picked up on the sibilance in stanza 3. Only the most developed answers looked closely at the language, the effects of the repetitions, and of the change of rhythm in the final stanza.

**From JO PHILLIPS ed: *Poems Deep & Dangerous***

**Question 3: *The Gift***

This was a popular poem and practically all candidates noted the role reversal it contains. Almost all understood the poem and the idea that an awful accident can be a gift if it produces such a wonderful response in someone who is so dear to you. Some speculated on the relationship between the mother and her son before the accident, but offered no textual evidence for this. Those who looked at the effects of the mother's description of her son as 'tall, cool ... sixteen' and spent a little time exploring the implications of this turned it into a very useful point. Most made some relevant comment on a little of the language, especially the image of the mother bird 'guarding its young', though higher achieving answers offered a little more comment on this than the standard answer which noted the role reversal and just quoted this without comment as 'proof'. Clearly, answers were differentiated by the level of analysis offered as most understood the poem, some however suggesting that the mother and son had always had a close relationship, and citing her calling him 'cool' as proving how much she admired him. Only the most accomplished answers made anything of the one-line tailpiece of the poem – set apart from the rest.

**Question 4: *Laundrette***

There were quite a number of responses to this poem, and candidates usually managed to focus on the 'atmosphere' as the question asks, but the level of analysis of how this is vividly depicted varied enormously. Most responses said something about the literal 'atmosphere' – steam and blurring – 'nebulous in steam' – though 'calms the air' made no impression and was not considered. The sights, colours, but particularly the sounds of the laundrette were looked at in varying degrees of closeness and analysis, and better answers were able to direct this material to make a relevant response to the question. Many candidates were able to grasp the metaphorical force of the poem and wrote convincingly about the washing machines' cycle representing the predictability of the customers' lives. The most accomplished answers were able to analyse the presentation of the little thumbnail portraits of the denizens of the establishment, and argue what and how these add to the atmosphere of the place. Similarly, stronger answers noted the way in which the public space creates an even deeper isolation between those characters. Unfortunately not everyone seemed to be aware what a laundrette is, supporting the point that not all poems had been studied in sufficient detail in advance of the examination.

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

**Question 5: *The Lost Woman...***

This was a popular poem but often it appeared only partly understood. Generally candidates tried to analyse the relationship between the mother and daughter prior to the mother's death, and there was much speculation and little hard evidence given. More confident answers saw the importance for the relationship and the poem of 'I never saw / Her buried' but often did not elaborate sufficiently on this. Less accomplished answers misunderstood altogether 'So a romance began', but candidates who did understand this made some useful comment on the complex nature of the relationship when discussing it. A few candidates made comment on the image of the 'ivy-mother' and 'My tendrils are the ones that clutch'. At this point many candidates who did not understand the poem merely cut to the end and ignored the imaginary life of the mother created by the daughter. Others who did not understand took this as a reminiscence of the mother's actual life. A few who did understand this and were willing to discuss it in detail managed to get a long way towards the core of the poem and, indeed, to answering the question of how the poet conveys 'the complex relationship' between speaker and mother. Very few candidates managed to make much of stanzas 4 and 5. Those who had an inkling of what Beer was 'on about' here were able to make the necessary comparison between 'Many a hero' and 'my lost woman' who 'snaps'. More needed to be made of this verb. Most,

however, made comment – relevant or not – to the fact that at the end of the poem the ‘lost woman’ turns out to be the speaker, not the mother, an irony, one candidate argued, that was hinted at by the ellipsis in the title of the poem.

**Question 6: ‘She Was a Phantom of Delight’**

This was probably the most popular question on the whole paper, but few candidates did much more than point out what they thought the poet is saying (or ‘trying to say’). More analysis of the language rather than mere reference to it would have elevated most of the responses that were offered. Generally candidates related ‘joy’ to happiness and this was obviously acceptable, though many less confident candidates merely set out on a long paraphrase and only reached the word ‘joy’ in their final paragraph, sometimes their final sentence. Not many candidates were convincing in any way on the expression ‘The very pulse of the machine’. Candidates quoting ‘Praise, blame, love, kisses, tears, and smiles’ did not analyse the words individually or comment on the effect of them all together like this, merely device-spotting ‘asyndeton’ and leaving it at that. All in all, there was a lack of focus on the wording of the question and a reluctance to explore the implications of some of the imagery used.

**Section B: Prose**

**CHINUA ACHEBE: *No Longer at Ease***

**Question 7**

This was a popular question on a popular choice of text, but the focus on drama was maintained by only a minority of those opting to answer it. Better answers briefly sketched in the context before looking closely at the full passage. Much of the drama is as a direct consequence of what Obi has to ‘report back’ to Clara, and his consequent anxiety in meeting her to do this. Very few answers giving the context then went on to spell out this underlying dramatic tension. Many responses did manage to comment on the drama which unfolds when Clara and Obi do eventually meet, though few looked sufficiently closely at the dialogue to make perceptive comment on how it reveals the tension between them. Candidates who did this achieved highly. The conversation between Clara and Obi where ‘Obi had done his best to make the whole thing (his parents’, in particular his mother’s, outright opposition to the wedding) sound unimportant’ needed a lot more attention than most candidates afforded it. Most contented themselves with a reference to Clara’s threat to throw her engagement ring ‘out of the widow’: relevant material but under-directed in terms of the drama of the passage. Surprisingly few focused on Clara’s comments that there was something she wanted to tell him and that he should ‘forget’ it – many did not mention at all the context for this, showing some lack of knowledge of the text. There were only a few attempts to comment on the impact of the writing, for example on the effect of the reference to the traffic and to the procession in building tension.

**Question 8**

There were some very convincingly argued responses to this question; in fact it was one of the more popular general essay questions and had clearly been discussed and carefully thought about. There were some under-directed narrative responses in weaker answers. Many answers made clear that Obi’s downfall involved the taking of bribes, the notion of which he pours scorn on earlier in the novel. Many also asserted that his stubbornness in persisting in his plan to marry Clara, an *osu*; his pride in living up to the demands and expectations of other people of a man in his position; his bad luck at having money stolen and his response to this, and – perhaps less convincingly – various arguments with the Umuofia Progressive Union all lead to his downfall, but few really argued this fully or considered ‘to what extent’ this makes his downfall his own fault. More accomplished answers explored his character in some depth and were able to see, and indeed argue, that the idea of bribery was so endemic that it might be said that it was impossible for anyone – even someone less naïve, less idealistic and less pig-headed than Obi – to resist becoming involved at some stage. Some candidates had clearly learnt some quotations and used them even though they did not fit the subject matter, trying to force them into the discussion.

**JANE AUSTEN: *Northanger Abbey***

**Question 9**

Few answers to this question really explored the ways it was entertaining, though some did make a few relevant comments about some of the gentle mockery of girls like Catherine that Henry indulges in here. Very few seemed to be familiar with the social niceties and rules which Austen is mocking. The main restricting feature was the lack of sensitive appreciation of the wit and role-playing, almost, that Henry Tilney



is given by Austen in this section. This was caused by the inattention to close details of the writing itself – something which this question demanded if a well-developed relevant personal response was to be achieved.

### Question 10

There were only a few responses to this question and they tended to be somewhat narrative. Some focused on Catherine's constant immersion in Gothic novels; some were able to compare her ideas, as fostered by this immersion, with the reality of Northanger Abbey when she visits it; and most were able to make reference to her outrageous conviction that Henry Tilney's mother has been murdered by his father. Listing these is one thing – directing them to the terms of the question proved another, and very few candidates ended up with a really relevant answer to what makes these things such a memorable and significant part of the novel, let alone how Austen makes Catherine's obsession with Gothic novels, which leads to these things, equally memorable and significant.

### GEORGE ELIOT: *Silas Marner*

#### Question 11

Only the more confident responses were able to offer a range of references to the passage to show how amusing or how engaging the action is here. Very few reached the level where they could comment on the way that Eliot expresses the material – a major part of the entertainment here – and therefore these were able to offer only reasonably developed answers. These reasonably developed responses usually commented on how little Eppie's escape is quite amusing because of her resourcefulness, and many were able to see the failed attempts of Silas to be cross with her as amusing and therefore entertaining. Some even made comment on the delighted response of Eppie to the threat of being put in the coal-hole. However no comment was made on the dead-pan last line of the passage: '... though, perhaps, it would have been better if Eppie had cried more.'

#### Question 12

Most responses heartily agreed with the judgement offered of Godfrey. The standard answer berated Godfrey for his treatment of his wife, Molly; the way he initially relinquishes any real care for Eppie; and afterwards for his selfish desire to take her away from Silas. More insightful answers realised that 'to what extent?' requires a more thoughtful approach to answering, and looked at the question in a more balanced manner. Most were able to see him as a cut above his brother: maybe a 'victim of circumstances', not evil but careless, and sometimes badly treated. One really well-developed and well-argued response saw that perhaps his suffering was such that by the end he had maybe paid more than enough for his lack of judgement in his earlier life. What characterised an effective answer was – as usual – an excellent knowledge of the text and a judicious selection of material to support a well-argued answer to the terms of the question.

### MICHAEL FRAYN: *Spies*

#### Question 13

There were fewer responses to this novel than might have been expected, but the majority of those answering on it selected this question. High achieving answers needed to look closely at the passage and to direct the material carefully to the terms of the question. Often such answers started with a brief contextualising paragraph before homing in on some of the disturbing detail, and then exploring the language used to present it. Some insightful responses commented on the dialogue, and the increasing pressure (verbal and at 'bayonet'-point) Stephen comes up against. The short sentences making clear the frozen terror Stephen experiences were often quoted and commented upon effectively to argue the disturbing nature of the scene. Effective answers also made comment on the unpleasant implications of Keith's mother always wearing a scarf, and what this suggests about where Keith learns this kind of torturous behaviour. The last lines of the passage were rarely commented upon.

#### Question 14

This was a less popular question, but those who attempted it knew the text and generally showed great sympathy for Auntie Dee, who carries on without her husband and in fact is betrayed by her own sister. They generally wrote persuasively and supported their answers in general terms though some precise details would have enhanced them.



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

**Question 15**

Fewer examples of response to this text appeared than expected in this series. Those who offered this text almost all attempted this question and usually found something relevant to say, though this often just boiled down to the fact that Kingshaw had very little 'relationship' with adults, even his mother. Some made this point quite clearly, seeing her as more interested in making headway in a relationship with Mr Hooper, and quoting – relevantly – 'Do not spoil everything for me'. Few candidates got far enough to consider Kingshaw's limited relationship with Mr Hooper. In fact it was rare for any answer to address the issue of 'vivid portrayal' of relationship, because the writing of the passage was not generally explored in any depth.

**Question 16**

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

**R K NARAYAN: *The English Teacher***

**Question 17**

This was a popular choice. Most were able to say that the Headmaster has no control over his children and that he and his wife have a poor relationship. Some then developed this with a number of relevant quotations from across the passage but others tended to repeat the same idea, lacking detail and development. Quite a few wrote extensively about Krishna's home life which, although relevant to a point when paired with the quotation that the Headmaster felt more at home there, often took up too much of the essay, as focus was lost on the passage. Most answers were very hostile to the Headmaster's wife, and very willing to pity the man who doesn't seem to want to be at home but instead in his school. A few more successful answers noticed that the question looked for response to 'striking portrayal' of the home life and made the effort to look at Narayan's writing, but such answers were few and far between.

**Question 18**

Only a few responses to this question were offered and most seemed to have only the haziest idea of who Dr Sankar is. Some candidates understood Dr Sankar's role in the novel but were unable to provide much specific detail to support their arguments. Consequently, responses tended to be narrative, assertive and general in their approach. There was no recognition of Narayan's satirical treatment of him.

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

**Question 19**

There is much relevant material in this passage, yet many candidates found it difficult to develop a convincing response to the question set. Most of the problems came from candidates not responding fully enough to the 'how?' of the question. Reading of the passage was rarely rigorous enough, but even when candidates found several relevant areas for discussion (the cheque and the fact it is drawn on the account of a very respectable person; the building itself; Mr Enfield's caginess; his strange inability even to describe Hyde) they rarely explored the language used to present this, and hence missed the opportunity to tackle what the question really demands. Some candidates spent an inordinate amount of time on discussing Victorian attitudes to privacy.

**Question 20**

This was a much less popular a question, and candidates who offered it often struggled to supply sufficient detail of the relationship between the characters. Few seemed able to see how the closeness of their friendship and their mutual friendship with Jekyll proves significant in the way in which the story is narrated. More successful answers were able to detail the two characters' experiences of contact with Hyde and direct this to the terms of the question. Often, though, such material did not get much beyond the narrative of incidents. Few candidates made anything of the effect on Utterson of Lanyon's death, and the key exposition of the truth that is offered in what Lanyon has left behind him. The most accomplished answers to this question had a good grasp of the structure of the novel, realised that Utterson and Lanyon were crucial to its effectiveness, and showed how.

### **From *Stories of Ourselves***

#### **Question 21: *Ming's Biggest Prey***

This was a popular question, but sometimes candidates did little more than re-tell some of the passage. In fact, more detail needed to be explored than most candidates seemed to realise. Sometimes the answers were too general on the relationship between Ming and Teddie and did not go far beyond narrative illustration of it. High achieving answers always made it clear what was 'satisfying' about the ending, and went further than just making the point that Eddie 'had it coming to him' for his treatment of Ming. Some answers took the 'satisfying' to mean satisfying to Ming, and some credit was allowed for this, but the most accomplished answers were able to argue that a wide range of problems mounting for Elaine, including the likely killing of her pet and the loss of her expensive jewellery, were solved to the readers' delight by Ming's actions. These answers looked at the language of the presentation of this ending during the printed passage and showed how this contributed to how 'satisfying' the ending becomes. A few candidates were horrified by a cat committing murder and getting away with it. Somehow they still managed to agree that the ending was 'satisfying'. This question did demonstrate the point made above concerning knowledge of the texts and the importance of context, since a few candidates seemed to have no idea that Ming is a cat. The most effective responses looked at how the whole story was written from Ming's viewpoint, and therefore his victory was made more satisfying because we felt part of it.

#### **Question 22: *The Prison***

Candidates answering this question generally made a reasonable attempt to justify the appropriateness of the title, and better answers were able to quote selectively to draw the parallels between physical prison and the metaphorical prison of Tommy's sterile, meaningless life: trapped in a loveless marriage; bored by a tedious job; and powerless to break free from his boredom and discontent. Many of the most accomplished answers attempted to make something of his dealings with the little girl who steals from the shop, and some managed to do more than merely add the narrative of this – seeing it sometimes as Tommy's desperation to prevent her becoming trapped in a life of thieving, an attempt maybe to make a difference to someone who may end up like himself. Practically all candidates were able to say something relevant. The highest achieving were able to offer a range of material and to argue their viewpoint, and not let the narrative speak for itself. Frequently candidates were able to provide relevant quotations and language comments.

# 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:

- giving unneeded extraneous biographical information
- commenting on how the use of punctuation exclusively adds to the mood and tone of a poem
- describing rhyme schemes and verse forms without showing their function
- answering the general essay question on a text solely by reference to the extract
- treating a poem or passage as an Unseen exercise.

Success will come from:

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

## General comments

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 most accomplished answers were full of well supported personal responses to the questions and showed sensitivity to the writers' methods and intentions.

Most candidates demonstrated knowledge and understanding of their texts, and as usual there were some strong answers to questions. What characterised these good responses was an ability to focus clearly on the terms of the question, and to direct relevant material, supporting it with succinct reference to, and often direct quotation from, the text concerned. Exploration of writers' use of language, and analysis of this, particularly in response to poetry answers, was the hallmark of a high-band answer.

The performance of some candidates was limited by their lack of focus on the terms of the question, and candidates might well be advised to think more carefully about what a question is asking, and plan out a response more carefully, before setting out to respond. 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 and it was good to see that in many cases this advice had been noted and acted upon. Some candidates limited themselves by offering a narrow range of material which they repeated, sometimes several times, during their response. The intensifiers in the question, the words such as 'vividly', 'dramatically', 'memorably', were still neglected as was apparent from the lack of response to the quality of the writing. Many candidates did continually refer back to the question, focusing on the key words, for example, 'moving', 'joy' and 'create drama', which helped them provide answers which addressed the question.

Long quotations, or listing key words and labelling them a 'semantic field', is description and not analysis. Recognition of literary devices such as similes and alliteration does not by itself constitute analysis. Describing rhyme schemes and verse forms is rarely particularly relevant to the question. The use of phrases

such as 'positive' or 'negative connotations' communicates very little and there was an increase in the use of imprecise slang expressions such as 'positive vibe' and 'zoned out'. Precise comments on the effects created are essential in order to make useful points and they are the sign of a good answer. 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.

Though not as significant a number as in the previous series, there were still examples of essay questions being answered by candidates using exclusively the material in the printed passage. Candidates need to remember that there is a choice of questions on each text and that the second one is a standalone general essay question. The passage is 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 involved is always going to be at best self-limiting, since it does not offer enough material for a general discursive answer.

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 their own sentences. Excessively long quotations can at most 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 understanding or of commentary.

For a long time the passage-based questions have been significantly more popular than the discursive ones, and this continued to be the pattern though there were some pleasing responses to the general questions on some of the novels, in particular *No Longer at Ease* and *Silas Marner*. Those candidates who did attempt the general questions often achieved highly because of the quality of their engagement with the text and the persuasiveness of their arguments, though they were sometimes over-reliant on generalisations and could have benefited from even just a little more specific reference. In the passage-based questions a lot of responses did not look closely enough at the effect on the reader who, surely, must be the obvious focus. Candidates need to give more consideration to what makes them smile, laugh, feel empathy / sympathy or even feel disturbed and then look for the evidence within the passage.

There was still a good deal of evidence that candidates were using the passage-based questions as 'Unseen' exercises; particularly the poetry questions where lack of understanding rapidly revealed itself. Similarly with the prose extracts, a lack of knowledge of the context quickly became apparent. The words 'at this moment in the novel' or variants of them are a signal to candidates that they need to use the wider context to support their ideas. Answers which limit themselves entirely to the extracts will probably not achieve particularly highly. There is no escaping the fact that candidates need to know the texts in detail.

There were very few rubric errors made this series, 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.

### **Comments on specific questions**

#### **Section A: Poetry**

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

###### **Question 1: *At the Word 'Farewell'***

The most successful responses explored with some sensitivity the ways in which Hardy uses language and form to convey powerful emotions. These responses considered the impact of the ghostly atmosphere and the description of the dawn and dampness in conveying the speaker's emotions. There was consideration of the lack of a sense of the future for the speaker, and of the role of fate in his life-changing meeting with the woman. Stronger responses were alert to the implications of the final stanza: the declaration made by the speaker at the start and the crimson cheek 'When we came in together' at the end. There was less evidence in this session of candidates pursuing a doggedly overly-assertive biographical reading of the poem.

###### **Question 2: *The Convergence of the Twain***

The highest achieving responses provided sensitive explorations of the ways in which Hardy uses language to striking effect. There was much detailed probing of the descriptions of the sea-worms crawling over the opulent features of the sunken Titanic. More confident responses linked their comments on language to a

consideration of 'The Pride of Life that planned her' and 'this vaingloriousness down here'. The role of 'The Immanent Will', the metaphor of the 'sinister mate', and the dramatic impact of 'Now!' in the final stanza were also explored. Few responses, however, connected the ideas on pride and vanity to the detail of the poem such as the blackened jewels ('their sparkles bleared and black'). In less successful responses, candidates often adopted a feature-spotting approach where imagery and sound devices were identified and sometimes explained. These responses tended to be list-like, rather than developed critical responses.

### From Jo Phillips ed.: *Poems Deep and Dangerous*

#### Question 3: *Shall I Compare Thee...?*

A few confident answers offered convincing personal responses to the total commitment of the speaker and the sheer exuberance of his address to his lover. There were sustained critical explorations of the use of metaphor and hyperbole in making the sonnet such a moving expression of love. Inevitably the widespread availability of study guides to the poem took its toll in many responses, as candidates opted to describe the content through each quatrain and up to and including the rhyming couplet that ends the sonnet. There were many descriptions of the ABAB rhyme scheme which 'makes the writing flow'. Too often comments on poetic structure and form led to the logging of features rather than a purposeful critical exploration of the effects Shakespeare creates. Phrases such as 'The sonnet begins with...' and 'The ending of the sonnet...' were often more helpful as paragraph starters in those answers which provided sustained analysis of both content and techniques.

#### Question 4: *First Love*

Virtually all responses acknowledged the unrequited nature of the speaker's love, the suddenness of the experience of first love, the blinding beauty of the girl and the subsequent onslaught on the speaker's senses. The most confident responses explored Clare's striking use of imagery, and commented on the suggestion of the permanent effect of the experience on the speaker. These responses kept in their sights the task: 'Explore the ways in which Clare vividly conveys the strength of the speaker's feelings in *First Love*.' The strongest answers engaged fully with the steer in the question provided by the adverb 'vividly', and often provided fresh explorations of this mainstay of school poetry anthologies. Less successful responses disregarded the main thrust of the question and worked through each stanza in turn, often adopting a descriptive and overly-assertive approach. Comments about the experience being 'relatable', and overly empathic comments about blood rushing to the reader's face and burning about the reader's heart, offered general rather than critical responses.

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

#### Question 5: *Lovers' Infiniteness...*

The most successful answers engaged with the poet's use of structure in their analysis of the development and resolution of the speaker's argument. These responses explored the implications created by the use of transactional imagery ('bargain', 'stocks', 'outbid') and what this revealed about the speaker. There was alertness too to what the use of hyperbole ('Sighs, tears, and oaths, and letters I have spent') revealed of the speaker's character and his own sense of his having been treated unjustly. Less confident responses worked through each stanza with an explanation of what the speaker was 'trying' to say; such responses neglected the main thrust of the question: 'How does Donne *strikingly* convey...?' These responses would have been lifted by some consideration of the ways in which Donne achieves his effects. As with **Question 3** (on '*Shall I Compare Thee...*'), much time was expended to the identification of the rhyme scheme without purposeful critical comment.

#### Question 6: *Tiger in the Menagerie*

The most accomplished responses focused clearly on the question ('How does Jones create a sense of menace...?') and rooted their interpretation in the detail of the poem. They pointed to the mystery surrounding the tiger's entry into the menagerie ('No one could say') and the effects of the blurring of the bars of the cage, and the stripes of the tiger and the impact of the repeated word 'lashes'. Most were able to comment on the personification of the aviary in the final stanza ('if the aviary could, it would lock its door') and the panic conveyed by 'Its heart began to beat in rows of rising birds'. These points were readily linked to the question's 'sense of menace'. There were, however, some responses that attempted to impose a particular rehearsed reading of the poem which neglected to address the question. Some responses that argued the tiger represented violence in society or violence within the human heart did not always support their arguments by means of careful reference to the detail of the poem. Detailed exploration of the precise effects



of language, structure and form in response to the question ('How...?') should help to avoid rigid and overly-assertive readings of a poem.

### **Section B: Prose**

#### **CHINUA ACHEBE: *No Longer at Ease***

##### **Question 7**

The relatively few responses seen were confident about the context: Obi's return from his years of study in England. The references to bribery towards the end of the extract were satisfactorily placed within the wider context of the novel. Some candidates, however, focused very largely on this aspect of the extract without exploring the detail of Achebe's writing. Only the most accomplished responses analysed the elaborate formality of the reception and language of the Welcome Address, contrasted with the informality that characterised Obi's own speech and appearance. These responses acknowledged the humour in the extract: in particular, the comedy presented in the contrast between the verbosity of the secretary of the union and immediately afterwards the feebleness of Obi's efforts at public speaking. Obi's two mistakes revealed the gap between Obi's English-influenced demeanour and the expectations of his compatriots. Less developed responses worked through the extract in order in an explanatory way rather than develop a commentary based on carefully-selected detail from the extract.

##### **Question 8**

There were too few responses to make meaningful comment.

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

##### **Question 9**

Only a few responses were seen, and few captured the sheer awfulness of Isabella in the printed extract, with a number of answers misreading her 'chastising' of Mr Morland and the 'playfulness' of her banter. The more successful responses explored the qualities of Austen's writing (in particular, the use of dialogue) in capturing Isabella's melodramatic entrance ('I have been wretched without you'), her exaggerations regarding both James and Eleanor Tilney, and her flirtatiousness. The most accomplished responses commented on the way in which Catherine begins to see through Isabella.

##### **Question 10**

The few who attempted this question enjoyed giving their opinions on this larger-than-life character. Most of the responses acknowledged Thorpe's boorishness and his materialism, his looking for a rich wife, his mistakenly believing that Catherine fits the bill, and his ruthlessness in trying to prevent her engaging with the Tilneys. However, there was little evidence of a detailed exploration of Austen's writing, and the varied ways in which she captures Thorpe's superficiality – not least in her mockery of his great interest in sports and his minimal interest in books.

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

##### **Question 11**

The most accomplished answers made judicious selection of detail from the extract and developed their responses in detail, exploring the language of their chosen references in order to show how Austen makes the moment so dramatic. The moment captures Molly on her way to expose Godfrey. High achieving responses explored Eliot's use of language, form and structure – with particular emphasis on the shock of Silas's entrance with Eppie, the narrative focus on Godfrey's inner turmoil upon recognising his daughter, and the intervention of the squire and rector. These responses saw the importance to the rest of the novel of Silas's sudden realisation that he must keep the child. They grasped too the extract's significance within the wider novel, namely that this incident leads to the greater acceptance of Silas in the Raveloe community.

##### **Question 12**

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



**MICHAEL FRAYN: *Spies***

**Question 13**

Those who did well kept the key word ‘amusingly’ in their sights and captured the humour in the boys’ naïve thoughts and rituals, contrasted with the real trials and dangers of the adult world they would soon be a part of. These more successful responses referred not only to the mimicking of secret rituals but also the way in which children imbue random objects with such significance. These responses often explored Stephen’s viewpoint, and the gentle humour present in his concerns about the more ordinary aspects of daily life such as School and tea. Most responses acknowledged the sinister implications of the ‘bayonet’. Less developed responses tended to work through the extract in order, explain its content and / or neglect to focus on Frayn’s use of humour.

**Question 14**

Only a few responses to this question were seen. There was often an acknowledgement of the enigmatic nature of Mrs Hayward’s character, the unhappiness in her marriage and her husband’s abusive treatment of her, and also her compassion seen in the way she deals with Stephen. Fewer responses commented on the lengths she goes to save her lover. Some more developed responses avoided a list of character traits and actions and instead focused on a more detailed exploration of key moments, such as the meeting in the hiding place with Stephen where the pressure she is clearly under and her vulnerability are brought to the fore.

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

**Question 15**

The most accomplished responses explored Hill’s use of structure in creating suspense in the printed extract, identifying clear moments of change and progression, culminating in the sudden and dramatic appearance of Hooper at the end of the extract. These candidates had the confidence to select material judiciously and explore the detail of the writing, whereas less developed responses charted the level of suspense using a descriptive, almost line-by-line approach. Most answers commented on the depiction of Kingshaw’s reactions to the initially unidentified sound and were clear about the immediate context: Kingshaw has run away from Warings (and Hooper) and is seeking refuge in Hang Wood. There was some commentary on Hill’s use of short sentences in building suspense, though too often actual examples were not provided and the link between ‘short, snappy sentences’ and suspense was left to the Examiner to work out.

**Question 16**

Most candidates offered an undiluted portrait of a wicked woman, though a minority of responses offered some attempt at balance, usually citing Mrs Kingsley’s status as a widow obliged to search for a potential husband. Candidates were free to take whatever line they wanted, though it was important that assertions made were substantiated by means of reference to the text. Most answers reflected on Mrs Kingsley’s inadequacy as a mother, the unfairness of some of her rebukes to her son, and her failure ever to listen to what he has to say. Beyond the pale, thought many, was her maternal comforting of the monstrous Hooper following the suicide of her son. Although many were able to enumerate the flaws in her character, few were able to select and analyse key aspects of Hill’s writing in generating readers’ responses to the character.

**R K NARAYAN: *The English Teacher***

**Question 17**

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

**Question 18**

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

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

**Question 19**

The most successful responses provided convincing critical explorations of the ways in which Stevenson conveys both Lanyon's despair and Utterson's confusion. These responses noted Utterson's shock on seeing the physical decline of his close friend Lanyon, and were alert to the more melodramatic aspects of their dialogue ('...spare me any allusion to one whom I regard as dead'). Less developed responses neglected to comment on this moment's significance within the wider novella and thus found it difficult to give full reasons why sympathy was due to either character. Some responses listed features of language and / or structure without developing or sustaining a critical response; a detached overview was absent from such responses. Some candidates took refuge in very general and unproductive assertions about context (e.g. gentlemen in those days did not pry into other gentlemen's business), rather than a detailed analysis of Stevenson's writing.

**Question 20**

The few candidates who responded to this question made relevant selections from the text of moments they found 'particularly shocking'. Inevitably popular choices were the trampling of the young girl and Carew's murder. Less confident answers simply re-told the story of each episode whereas more developed responses were able to explore the effects created by the writing. The most accomplished responses demonstrated excellent recall of detail (and of concise direct quotation) from these key moments. Some of these responses analysed narrative viewpoint, in particular, the effect of recalling these two incidents from the perspective, respectively, of Enfield and the maid. Some candidates opted to write about wider social (upper class gentlemen, duality) and literary contexts (the Gothic) rather than address the question directly. These were generally context points for their own sake rather than contextual points that illuminated a reading of the actual text in addressing the question set.

**From *Stories of Ourselves***

**Question 21: *Billennium***

Candidates answering on this text overwhelmingly chose this question. Most responses commented on the dimensions of the cubicle, the flimsiness of the building, the overcrowding, and the noise. Higher achieving responses wrote about the implications of the lack of privacy on the freedom and independence of the individuals in this dystopian society. The most accomplished responses explored the effect of the restrictions on characters and friendships, and the implications that the restrictions will increase in the future. These responses also provided detailed explorations of Ballard's presentation of the setting and linked these to the key words of the question: 'such a depressing opening to the story'. The least developed responses worked through the extract sometimes using much quotation but without close analysis of textual detail.

**Question 22: *Of White Hairs and Cricket***

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

# LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

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Paper 0486/21  
Drama 21

## Key messages

- Candidates who took time to read the question carefully and responded to its demands wrote the most successful answers
- Most responses would have been improved by more detailed knowledge of the text and an ability to use direct quotations from it
- Convincing answers showed awareness of the dramatist's methods, effects and intentions
- Higher achieving candidates viewed the text from an audience perspective and understood the role of stage directions
- The most successful responses avoided narrative and lengthy contextualisation.

## General comments

Many candidates wrote very successfully about characterisation, theme, structure and ideas and showed great enthusiasm and independence of thought. In the main, the plays had clearly been enjoyed and discussed in detail. The route to improvement in examination performance for most candidates would be in developing more thorough and detailed textual knowledge. This would enable candidates to have the confidence to respond to questions they had not necessarily rehearsed prior to the examination, and to explore their own ideas and responses. It would also enable them to make close reference to the text in support of these ideas. Candidates who avoided simplistic labelling of ideas in the texts such as 'Capitalist / Socialist' in *An Inspector Calls* and 'The American Dream' in *All My Sons* generally wrote more interesting answers. Less successful answers often expressed only a partial understanding or sometimes a complete misunderstanding of these terms, and used them unhelpfully.

Practice in close reading of the text is necessary to respond adequately to passage-based questions. An awareness of the context within the play as a whole, without explaining it at length, an understanding of what is being said in the passage and how it is being said, likely audience response, and the significance of the scene and the author's aims all need to be considered in preparation for the examination.

Strong responses in this series were not limited to description or explanation of the passage, but gave an analysis of its impact and effects. They briefly put the passage into context and used numerous brief, well-integrated quotations, commenting on their effect in the passage.

In answering the discursive questions, candidates would benefit from greater ease in referring closely to the text. Often sound and developed arguments were restricted by lack of close textual reference in support.

The strongest responses understood terms of the genre such as 'suspense' and 'dramatic irony', used a wide range of material, avoided using the passage from the previous question in the answer and resisted re-telling the narrative. There were a few responses this session, especially on *The Merchant of Venice*, where candidates thought the discursive question related to the passage set for the passage question. Candidates need to be clear that the two are entirely separate.

Candidates who paid attention to key terms in the question, and had thought about how an audience sitting in a theatre would be likely to think and feel at given moments in the play fared well.

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 reiterated points already made could have been better used to give a wider range of ideas or more detailed analysis.

There were very few rubric infringements on Paper 21 this series but these still occur, and candidates need to be aware that they cannot answer two passage-based or two discursive questions. Although the message about candidates numbering their questions correctly appears to be being communicated, there are still a few who do not do this clearly or accurately. Candidates divided their time more successfully on Paper 21 than in the previous series.

### **Comments on specific questions**

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

##### **Question 1**

This was the most popular text and question this series. Most candidates recognised it was a crucial part of the play from the tense dialogue and dramatic conflict between Ann and Sue. The best answers identified Sue's comments which cause tension: her request of the 'small favor' that Ann and Chris move away after their marriage, and the revelation that everyone knows that 'Joe pulled a fast one to get out of jail.' Many candidates identified how Miller achieved his effects using stage directions and language. The patronising language Sue uses calling Ann 'Dear' and 'Darling', and the religious imagery of 'the hair shirt' and 'Holy Family', featured in these responses. Stronger answers related the passage to the wider context of the play: the importance of money, the American Dream, and idealism and materialism, showing awareness of the similarities between Sue and Joe. Less confident candidates showed little overall understanding of what was being discussed in the passage, suggesting Sue and Jim simply disliked Ann and Chris. They identified Miller's methods, supporting them with some relevant reference and quotation but without exploring them in the context of the passage. Candidates who simply focused on identifying stage directions, exclamation marks, question marks and ellipsis, without commenting on what Sue and Ann were actually discussing, were unable to achieve high reward.

##### **Question 2**

This was a less popular question. The best answers acknowledged the complexities of Kate's character and the real reasons for her expressing hope that Larry is alive – if she accepts he is dead, then Joe killed him through his part in the faulty cylinders. They considered Miller's methods in creating sympathy for a 'mother', her grief for the loss her son, and were able to balance this against the consequences – her refusal to accept Chris and Ann's marriage, and covering up Joe's guilt. The strongest answers saw her behaviour as reprehensible in the imprisonment of an innocent man, Steve Deever, her manipulation of George, and her awareness of Joe's crime (telling him to 'be smart') whilst simultaneously denying Chris and Ann happiness. Less high achieving responses were narrative, writing all about Kate and her part in the play – simply asserting in their conclusions that she was to be sympathised with, rather than analysing how the audience's sympathy is generated, or not, throughout the play.

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

##### **Question 3**

This was a very popular question. Some candidates seemed unaware of the meaning of 'suspense' and worked chronologically through the passage, relying on narration and paraphrase to show knowledge of the play. Most candidates were able to comment on the Inspector's methods of interrogating Sheila, the secrecy of showing the photo, and Sheila's dramatic running off stage. Key features often explored were the Inspector's gradual revelation of details, Sheila's dawning realisation of her involvement, and the warning contained in the Inspector's final words in the extract about who had 'made a mess' of a life. Stronger answers were clear on Priestley's socialist stance and how he transmitted that into the play, and supported their points with carefully selected quotation from the passage.

#### Question 4

Most candidates focused on the key word of the question, 'contrast', to choose moments of conflict between Mr and Mrs Birling and Sheila and Eric. The best answers also focused on 'dramatic effect', made reference to the behaviour and language used by the different generations, and acknowledged their frustrations and sense of powerlessness to change the other. Exploration of how Priestley conveyed his socialist message and how Eric and Sheila were the 'nation's future hope', in contrast with the older generation, were features of the best responses. Weaker responses identified members of each generation and narrated what they did to Eva, often without textual support and with no reference to the drama this created in the play.

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

#### Question 5

This was a more popular choice than Question 6. The most confident candidates conveyed understanding of the context of the passage, explored the playfulness and shift in focus from classical allusion to reality, and the significance of Stephano setting up the denouement. Some wrote knowledgeably about the mythological references, exploring the complexity of the relationship between Jessica and Lorenzo and the romantic setting and atmosphere. The strongest answers analysed the language and rhythmic structure of the passage with the repetition of, 'on such a night' and the romantic setting of Belmont, whilst conveying concern for Portia and Nerissa who were returning to confront Bassanio and Gratiano after the trial and acquisition of their rings. Some mentioned the style with reference to iambic pentameter, and the prose/poetry, but very few explored the effects created effectively. Less confident candidates showed some understanding of the scene with generalisations about what was happening and an awareness of context. Some of these approached the question from a director's perspective on how to direct or stage the scene, rather than analysing the text. Only the very best answers explored the humour and change in mood brought about by the arrival of Stephano and Launcelot.

#### Question 6

Many responses were discursive and described the experience of opening the caskets, and the reactions of the Prince of Morocco, Prince of Arragon and Bassanio, without evaluating how the testing was 'entertaining' or 'significant'. Most candidates understood Portia's father had devised the testing but only the highest achieving explored his intentions in doing so, evaluating the significance of the metals the caskets were made of, and their content. The strongest responses knew the text well, considered the significance of the testing as a catalyst to the plot, and supported comments on Portia's views of the suitors, explicitly addressing the terms of the question. Some candidates criticised Portia for what were perceived as her racist views of her suitor, failing to engage with her wit and the stereotyping she engages in to make the testing so 'entertaining' for the audience.

#### **WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Henry V***

#### Question 7

Too few answers were submitted to make comment appropriate.

#### Question 8

Too few answers were submitted to make comment appropriate.

#### **J LAWRENCE and R E LEE: *Inherit the Wind***

#### Question 9

This was not a very popular text. Most candidates who wrote on this text chose this question. Less confident candidates showed some knowledge and understanding of the text. They explained who Brady is, what he is doing in Hillsboro, and the theories of evolution and creationism with little focus on the question or passage. The best answers addressed 'dramatic', exploring the celebratory welcome song, the 'carnival' atmosphere with banners, and the ceremonial photograph. The writing was analysed in depth as was the dramatic impact of the introduction, with contrasts drawn between the introduction of Drummond and Brady and the clear understanding that this would be a difficult case for Drummond to win. The most insightful candidates emphasised Brady's high opinion of himself, and the certainty that he is right, as being the cause of his own downfall and death later in the play.

**Question 10**

Very few candidates responded to this question. Weaker answers retold the story. They identified the people as creationists, explained ‘the buckle on the bible belt’ and what Cates did, without considering how difficult it was to get a verdict against such a formidable united front of people. The best responses considered the biased atmosphere created by Hillsboro and how seriously the people took religion, making it a very intimidating trial for both Cates and the audience.



# LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

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Paper 0486/22  
Drama 22

## Key messages

- Candidates who took time to read the question carefully and responded to its demands wrote the most successful answers
- Most responses would have been improved by more detailed knowledge of the text and an ability to use direct quotations from it
- Convincing answers showed awareness of the dramatist's methods, effects and intentions
- Higher achieving candidates viewed the text from an audience perspective and understood the role of stage directions
- The most successful responses avoided narrative and lengthy contextualisation.

## General comments

Many candidates wrote very successfully about characterisation, theme, structure and ideas and showed great enthusiasm and independence of thought. In the main, the plays had clearly been enjoyed and discussed in detail. The route to improvement in examination performance for most candidates would be in developing more thorough and detailed textual knowledge. This would enable candidates to have the confidence to respond to questions they had not necessarily rehearsed prior to the examination, and to explore their own ideas and responses. It would also enable them to make close reference to the text in support of these ideas. Candidates who avoided simplistic labelling of ideas in the texts such as 'Capitalist / Socialist' in *An Inspector Calls* and 'The American Dream' in *All My Sons* generally wrote more interesting answers. Less successful answers often expressed only a partial understanding or sometimes a complete misunderstanding of these terms, and used them unhelpfully.

Practice in close reading of the text is necessary to respond adequately to passage-based questions. An awareness of the context within the play as a whole, without explaining it at length, an understanding of what is being said in the passage and how it is being said, likely audience response, and the significance of the scene and the author's aims all need to be considered in preparation for the examination.

Strong responses in this series were not limited to description or explanation of the passage, but gave an analysis of its impact and effects. They briefly put the passage into context and used numerous brief, well-integrated quotations, commenting on their effect in the passage.

In answering the discursive questions, candidates would benefit from greater ease in referring closely to the text. Often sound and developed arguments were restricted by lack of close textual reference in support.

The strongest responses understood terms of the genre such as 'suspense' and 'dramatic irony', used a wide range of material, avoided using the passage from the previous question in the answer and resisted re-telling the narrative. There were a few responses this session, especially on *The Merchant of Venice*, where candidates thought the discursive question related to the passage set for the passage question. Candidates need to be clear that the two are entirely separate.

Candidates who paid attention to key terms in the question, and had thought about how an audience sitting in a theatre would be likely to think and feel at given moments in the play fared well.

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 reiterated points already made could have been better used to give a wider range of ideas or more detailed analysis.

There were very few rubric infringements on Paper 22 this series but these still occur, and candidates need to be aware that they cannot answer two passage-based or two discursive questions. Although the message about candidates numbering their questions correctly appears to be being communicated, there are still a few who do not do this clearly or accurately. Candidates divided their time more successfully on Paper 22 than in the previous series.

### **Comments on specific questions**

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

##### **Question 1**

Candidates tackled this question either as an audience member who was as yet unaware of Joe's guilt, or with an overview of the play as a whole. Either approach was acceptable and answers were generally competent and relevant. Strong responses explored how Joe is 'being smart' here, aiming to disarm George and manipulate him into thinking that he cares about Steve. The contradictory strand of the dialogue where he piles guilt onto Steve and doubt onto George drew comment from most candidates. Joe's hypocrisy and the irony of his comments on accepting blame were fully appreciated in sound responses. The best answers gave the personal response the question required, showed a keen awareness of the ironies, and supported points fully from the passage. Less successful answers often selected key points but did not support them from the passage, or did not focus firmly on the question of how Miller's portrayal made them feel about Joe. There were a few responses which took Joe's words at face value or which misunderstood the context.

##### **Question 2**

Most candidates understood that the relationship between Kate and Ann played a central and major part in the play. The strongest answers explored this in dramatic terms rather than narrating the course of their relationship. The tensions between Ann and Kate caused by Ann's arrival, her contrasting response to Larry's disappearance, her relationship with Chris and George's intervention were explored, along with Ann's climactic revelation of Larry's letter and its powerfully dramatic consequences. An inability to refer closely to any of these powerful moments prevented many answers from achieving high marks. Several responses assumed that Ann's knowledge of the letter meant she thought Joe was guilty all along, whereas the play makes it clear that she, like George, until recently accepted their father's guilt.

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

##### **Question 3**

Many candidates showed an awareness of the drama created by Priestley's suggestion that the Inspector has foreknowledge of Mrs Birling's involvement, the Inspector's emotive presentation of Eva's plight, Sheila's forceful response, and the conflict created between family members. The most assured answers explored Mrs Birling's snobbery and evasiveness, the Inspector's tone, his blunt and persistent questioning, and the powerful dramatic irony of Sybil Birling not realising that she is talking about her own son. Less successful answers seemed unaware of the exact context, and were diverted into discussing the 'responsibility' theme rather than focussing sharply on the drama of this moment. Some spent too much time on how Mrs Birling has responded to the Inspector earlier in the play and, while this made a relevant point about contrast, it meant that the passage was often not explored in sufficient detail.

##### **Question 4**

This question produced a wide variety of responses, some of which seemed to have a far kinder view of Gerald than Priestley had perhaps intended. The most focussed responses selected material which reflected his role in the play. They balanced Gerald's kindness to Eva and regret over his treatment of her with his deception of Sheila, and his ultimate siding with the older generation in denial of responsibility. Confident answers supported their views with comment on how Gerald sides with Birling against the factory workers, hopes that his affair with Eva/ Daisy will not be revealed, and assumes that Sheila will still want to marry him at the end of the play. Some answers spent too long establishing his status or conveyed a strong response

to him without supporting this by close textual reference. Less successful responses tended to make sweeping assertions, ignoring his genuine care for Eva/Daisy, for example, or conversely omitting any reference to his disloyalty and deceit. Insightful answers recognised that there is some complexity in the portrayal.

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

**Question 5**

The majority of candidates made central comments on Shylock's intransigence, and Antonio's fatalism and love for Bassanio. Developed responses supported this by looking at Shylock's merciless stance, his unwillingness to speak to Antonio, his mockery of the fool who lends out money gratis, his repetitive language, and the undertones of religious conflict. They interpreted Antonio's tone as desperate and pleading rather than polite and regretful, and saw that he had given up and had no hope that the law would save him. Less sharply focussed answers mistook the context as the trial scene and asserted that Antonio regrets what he has done to Shylock in the past (a misunderstanding of: '*I oft have delivered from his forfeitures/Many that have at times made moan to me*'). Such responses spent too much time explaining the narrative context, or wrote little about Antonio and too much about Shylock's hatred of Antonio and the extent to which it is justified, with evidence from earlier in the play. Focus on the passage itself and exploration of Antonio's realism about the law and the state to which he has been reduced by his 'griefs and losses' were often the hallmark of a successful response.

**Question 6**

The most confident responses to this question chose their moments carefully and referred to them closely. The various casket choosing scenes and the trial were the most popular and successful selection, though some made a good case for Jessica's elopement or, to a lesser degree, the ring scenes. Developed answers commented on how the suspense was created, took the perspective of an audience, and referred closely to their chosen moments. Although most candidates chose effectively, their exploration of the moments and use of textual support could have been considerably improved. Many lost valuable time writing out the inscriptions on the three caskets, presumably because they had learned them, but made no response to the suspense. A few comments on Portia's 'quality of mercy' speech, her agreeing that the bond is valid and Shylock's sharpening his blade and preparing his scales, for example, would have made many inadequate answers perfectly competent.

**WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Henry V***

**Question 7**

Effective answers looked both at the striking nature of the situation, an anointed King in disguise speaking to common soldiers, and the striking language of Williams' speech about war and its consequences. For example: '*The use of the word 'raw' (in 'rawly left') creates a sense that the subject for their children is a painful one, similar to that of a raw wound*'. There was some exploration of the ideas of humanity of kings and the extent to which the foot soldiers share the guilt of a dishonourable cause. The dramatic irony of the men unknowingly criticising the King was appreciated. Less successful answers focussed almost exclusively on the situation without exploring the passage in sufficient detail.

**Question 8**

The majority of candidates who answered this question could see that the English lesson scene and Henry's wooing of Katherine were entertaining, but could not give sufficient detail from the scenes to prove their point. Many answers concentrated solely on the fact that Katherine's betrothal to Henry was political and that she was a woman in a largely male dominated cast. Neither of these points went very far in helping them to answer the question.

**J LAWRENCE AND R E LEE: *Inherit the Wind***

**Question 9**

This question was generally answered with some competence. Candidates commented on the importance of the visual representation of the town in the set, the introduction of the main themes of the play through Howard and Melinda, and the intrigue caused by Rachel's furtive arrival at the jail. Candidates seemed well-

prepared to discuss the functions of an opening to a play and understood what was required of them. As always, those who supported their points fully from the passage fared better than those who did not.

### **Question 10**

Most candidates chose to take a thematic view, and explored how Brady's downfall meant an end to fundamentalism and hope for more freedom of thought. The 'Golden Dancer' symbol was cited as representing Brady, who seemed everything on the outside but on the inside proved to be broken and hollow. There was, therefore, a stronger focus on 'significant' than 'dramatic'. Some candidates looked in detail at how Drummond demolished Brady in the court, and many commented on his followers deserting him and the embarrassing reciting of his presidential speech. A balanced concentration on drama as well as theme would have improved several responses.

# LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

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Paper 0486/23  
Drama 23

## Key messages

- Close attention to the detail of the set text is the primary characteristic of successful answers, and the careful use of brief, apt and well-integrated quotation is the key component of this close attention
- The most accomplished answers to extract-based questions start by quickly locating the extract in the context of the whole play, and then develop by concentrating on the detail of the printed extract
- The highest achieving candidates see the texts as scripts for performance and try to visualise the onstage action
- Candidates need to focus more clearly on the language of the dialogue. Excessive concentration on the wording of stage directions or the writer's use of punctuation is generally unhelpful.

## General comments

The best introductory paragraphs focus clearly on the terms of the question and begin to develop specific ideas, avoiding unhelpful generalisations, biographical details or lists of generic techniques. Sweeping comments on the writer's use of "dialogue, stage directions, punctuation...", or even just "language", hamper swift engagement with the selected question and text.

The best approach to extract-based questions is to establish the dramatic context for the prescribed passage in terms of the concerns of the characters on stage and the audience's overview of the evolving action at this point in the play, and then devote the bulk of the answer to discussing, quoting from and commenting on the printed extract itself.

The most effective answers to discursive questions stay anchored to the terms of the question throughout and select detailed and specific support for their arguments. In questions demanding the selection of particular "moments" (**Questions 2 and 8**), a sharp focus on the detail of a clearly-defined incident or specific section of dialogue is the key to success.

The tendency to use labels ("capitalist / socialist... the American Dream ...social responsibility ...foreshadowing...cliff-hanger...dramatic irony...") as if they speak for themselves and require no further explanation or exemplification restricted the development of some promising ideas. Similarly, some formulaic feature-logging approaches whereby candidates worked through a checklist of generic headings ("dialogue...stage directions...punctuation...language features...") tended to distance them from the dramatic impact of their selected play, and to convey little sense of them enjoying a theatrical experience. Lengthy digressions about the responses of different audiences (Elizabethan, Post-WW2...) also tended to obscure the candidate's own response, at times.

Examiners noted that rubric infringements appeared to be more common this series, with several 0486/23 candidates attempting either two extract-based questions or two discursive questions, and thereby reducing their available marks by half.

### Comments on specific questions

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

##### **Question 1**

There were many fine answers to this very popular question. Candidates often engaged closely with the complex and intense feelings of both characters, and clearly identified Chris's determination to marry Annie and perhaps to leave the business as the source of dramatic conflict not only in this scene, but also in scenes to come. Chris's uncharacteristic anger, frustration and decisiveness, and Keller's shock and desperation were often thoughtfully handled, with some close attention to the escalating tensions conveyed through Keller's anxious questioning and movements. The most accomplished answers avoided simplification and suggested that Keller is not just acting as a loyal husband and devoted father in this scene, but is also intent on self-preservation and concealing his own guilt in conspiring with Kate in the delusion that Larry is still alive. The intensity of Keller's feelings in the gesture of putting "a fist up to CHRIS's jaw" was often sensitively handled, though the extent of the physical violence involved was occasionally exaggerated. The ironic resonance of Keller's repeated words to his son about the business, "for you", was also thoughtfully picked up, and related to the climactic scene at the end of Act Two when Keller's guilt is finally revealed to Chris. Some candidates thought that Keller is referring to Annie, rather than Kate, when he says "She thinks he's coming back" and others were uncertain about the context and insisted that the audience is already convinced of Keller's guilt. Some were so intent on logging the number of interruptions, questions, ellipses...that they remained detached from the evolving action and the sources of conflict. Others insisted that Annie is Larry's wife.

##### **Question 2**

There was a range of convincingly "disturbing" moments provided by the candidates. The most popular and successful selections included Sue's acerbic conversation with Annie, Keller's barefaced manipulation of George, Kate's reading of Larry's letter to Annie, the confrontation between Keller and Chris after the revelation of Keller's guilt, and the impact of Keller's suicide at the end of the play. The most confident candidates were able to balance their time thoughtfully between the two clearly-defined moments, explore the specific detail and context for each moment, and focus explicitly on the disturbing elements. Less successful candidates chose moments which merged into each other, or became so sprawling that they appeared to occupy a whole Act and led to a rather generalised discussion as a result. Some candidates were distracted by thematic concerns, most notably "social responsibility", as if they were answering a different question.

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

##### **Question 3**

The power of the play's final scene was convincingly conveyed by many candidates in response to this very popular question. The contrasting reactions to the revelation of the "hoax" (and particularly the tension between Sheila and Mr Birling) were often explored in detail, and there was much thoughtful speculation about the timing and significance of the phone call, and its impact on both the characters and the audience. The most confident candidates traced not only the detail of the characters' contrasting reactions, but also the rapid shifts in mood, the impact of the sharp ring of the telephone (often linking this to the sharp ring of the doorbell in Act One), and the suspense as we hear one side of the telephone conversation and await Mr Birling's explanation. Less successful candidates tended to dive into the extract without suggesting an understanding of Gerald's call to the Infirmary (or Birling's to Colonel Roberts) and were therefore unable to place Birling's tone of triumph and relief in any kind of context; or were lured away from the dramatic impact of the scene on an audience by lengthy thematic discussions of social responsibility, the generational divide, capitalism versus socialism and so on. Answers tended to be overly dominated by Mr Birling or Sheila, as if they are the only two characters on stage, and the effect of Gerald's untimely production of the engagement ring seldom received attention. Some candidates were uncertain about what exactly "frightens" Sheila and Eric.

##### **Question 4**

Answers to this popular question were notable for their wide-ranging textual knowledge and the strength of the personal response to the Birlings. The best avoided the drift into lengthy narrative accounts of the culpability of each family member in the story of Eva Smith / Daisy Renton, and engaged fully with the Birlings "as a family" by exploring their dysfunctional relationships with each other. The portrayal of Mr Birling



as the kind of father in whom his son is unable to confide – and who is more interested in business relationships than his daughter’s happiness – was often thoughtfully explored. Similarly Mrs Birling’s foolish attempts to protect Sheila from the reality of the outside world, her inability to recognise Eric’s problem with drink and even her responsibility for the death of her own grandchild, were often intelligently cited as evidence of parental failings, alongside some well selected evidence of tensions between husband and wife, and, initially, between brother and sister. Many candidates responded very strongly and personally to the self-centred materialism of the family, the lack of understanding and affection between the parents and children, and the emergence of their contrasting values by the end of the play. Less successful candidates missed the family focus of the question and provided four individual character studies, or an answer entirely devoted to the themes of social responsibility and the generational divide.

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

#### **Question 5**

This was probably the most popular question across the three components, and many candidates managed the difficult feat of balancing their attention to the dramatic context and evolving situation with very close attention to the detail of the printed extract and features of the verse. The highest achieving candidates were aware of our foreknowledge of Antonio’s perilous situation, so that we await the impact of his letter on Bassanio and on the celebratory mood of the lovers in Belmont. There was much intelligent exploration of the building of suspense through Salerio’s cryptic responses to Bassanio and Gratiano, through Portia’s concerned description of Bassanio’s loss of colour and morbid speculation, through Bassanio’s desperate questioning, and through the delay in revealing the full contents of the letter. The candidates’ commentary on Bassanio’s dramatic personification of the paper and on Salerio’s portrayal of Shylock’s inhuman malevolence was often sensitive and well developed. Most candidates fully grasped the seriousness of Antonio’s predicament. Some found difficulty in understanding the exact nature of Bassanio’s “confession” to Portia, suggesting that he had boasted of his vast riches in wooing her, or that he is now pleading for her help, and others thought they were already married at this point. Portia’s touching concern for Bassanio and willingness to share his difficulties tended to be overlooked. The bond was occasionally characterised as a wager, and, at times, there was a tendency to drift from the detail of the extract and to launch into unhelpful discussions of the nature of Antonio’s feelings for Bassanio or of anti-semitism, though the need for Gratiano to urge Nerissa to welcome Jessica was rarely addressed.

#### **Question 6**

There were a few outstanding answers to this question which focused on the idea of “enjoyment”, and developed a clear and detailed view of the effect of contrast between the two locations. Venice was often seen as the serious world of business, dominated by men and beset by conflict and suspicion, with Belmont as the fairytale world of romance, music, comedy and happy resolutions. More subtle answers moved this argument on to suggest overlap in the portrayal of repressive fathers and in the evidence of racism and deception in both locations. However, some candidates lost contact with the question and simply recounted what happens in each location or drifted so far away from the detail of the text that the answers resembled generalised travel or historical guides to canals, trade and ghettos, rather than a close reading of the play.

### **WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Henry V***

#### **Question 7**

Most candidates were able to respond in some way to the power and violence of Henry’s language, and the most accomplished answers contained much close attention to features like the barbarity of the imagery, the insistent questioning which places responsibility on the Governor of Harfleur, the biblical allusions, and the final rhyming couplet. A variety of impressions of Henry’s determined leadership were suggested but the highest achieving candidates, whilst aware of his ruthlessness elsewhere in the play, saw his vicious threats as strategic bluffs designed to avoid bloodshed, and that the subtle purpose of his rhetorical flourishes was to manipulate the Governor. Less confident candidates tended to take his words at face value and to suggest that he was some kind of Herod-figure, personally intent on violating and murdering the innocents of Harfleur, rather than a leader trying to contain the worst instincts of his men.

#### **Question 8**

This question was rarely attempted, but several answers suggested genuine engagement with the play. The most popular and successful selections tended to be the scenes involving Katherine or the Eastcheap crew, though the “tennis balls” moment also received some thoughtful attention. The most

confident candidates were able to identify clearly-defined moments and refer in detail to entertaining features, including some impressively specific comments on language. Some found “entertaining” to be rather an elusive term and appeared to be shoe-horning prepared material on the role of the Chorus or the impact of Henry’s rhetoric in key speeches (including, occasionally, the printed passage for **Question 7**) into their answers. Nevertheless, most candidates managed to demonstrate their enjoyment of the play and to convey broadly entertaining effects.

### **J LAWRENCE and R E LEE: *Inherit the Wind***

#### **Question 9**

This text has attracted a small but enthusiastic following, and the majority of these candidates tackled this climactic courtroom scene. The highest achieving candidates fully understood the pivotal nature of this moment and the power shift from Brady to Drummond, and looked in detail at the impact of this confrontation between the play’s two heavyweights, both on the audience within the courtroom and the broader theatre audience. As with all extract-based questions, an awareness of context was a key component of successful answers and the candidates who could focus on Brady’s growing hesitancy and desperation in relation to the pomposity and confidence he has displayed hitherto, or rejoice in the triumph of Drummond’s rational enquiries about the age of the Earth after the rejection by the court of all expert testimony on evolution, produced highly effective answers. The increasing pace of Drummond’s questions, the laughter in the courtroom, the evidence of Brady’s discomfiture, and Davenport’s panicky attempt to intervene were often addressed as key features of the scene’s effect. Less confident candidates tended to take the dramatic context and the subject matter of the dialogue as read, and to remain detached from the characters or the scene as a theatrical experience by concentrating exclusively on the stage directions or the number of question marks.

#### **Question 10**

This question was a minority choice but most candidates fully understood the courageous nature of Bert’s stand, and the central function of his case in providing the battleground for competing ideologies. The most insightful candidates looked in some detail at the rounded portrayal of Bert as heroic but also as a shy, modest, fearful character, thrust into reluctant action by his belief in the freedom of thought and his concern for others, most notably Rachel and Tommy Stebbins. Less confident candidates tended to overlook his ordinariness and human frailties, and to characterise him as simply heroic. Others drifted away from the question and tended to concentrate exclusively on what Bert stands for and thematic concerns, so that the answers became dominated by explorations of the freedom of thought in collision with narrow-minded bigotry, or by the character of Drummond rather than Cates.

# LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

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Paper 0486/31  
Drama (Open Text) 31

## Key messages

- Candidates who took time to read the question carefully and responded to its demands wrote the most successful answers
- Most responses would have been improved by more detailed knowledge of the text and an ability to use direct quotations from it
- Convincing answers showed awareness of the dramatist's methods, effects and intentions
- Higher achieving candidates viewed the text from an audience perspective and understood the role of stage directions
- The most successful responses avoided narrative and lengthy contextualisation.

## General comments

Many candidates wrote very successfully about characterisation, theme, structure and ideas and showed great enthusiasm and independence of thought. In the main, the plays had clearly been enjoyed and discussed in detail. The route to improvement in examination performance for most candidates would be in developing more thorough and detailed textual knowledge. This would enable candidates to have the confidence to respond to questions they had not necessarily rehearsed prior to the examination, and to explore their own ideas and responses. It would also enable them to make close reference to the text in support of these ideas. Candidates who avoided simplistic labelling of ideas in the texts such as 'Capitalist / Socialist' in *An Inspector Calls* and 'The American Dream' in *All My Sons* generally wrote more interesting answers. Less successful answers often expressed only a partial understanding or sometimes a complete misunderstanding of these terms, and used them unhelpfully.

Practice in close reading of the text is necessary to respond adequately to passage-based questions. An awareness of the context within the play as a whole, without explaining it at length, an understanding of what is being said in the passage and how it is being said, likely audience response, and the significance of the scene and the author's aims all need to be considered in preparation for the examination.

Strong responses in this series were not limited to description or explanation of the passage, but gave an analysis of its impact and effects. They briefly put the passage into context and used numerous brief, well-integrated quotations, commenting on their effect in the passage.

In answering the discursive questions, candidates would benefit from greater ease in referring closely to the text. Often sound and developed arguments were restricted by lack of close textual reference in support.

The strongest responses understood terms of the genre such as 'suspense' and 'dramatic irony', used a wide range of material, avoided using the passage from the previous question in the answer and resisted re-telling the narrative. There were a few responses this session, especially on *The Merchant of Venice*, where candidates thought the discursive question related to the passage set for the passage question. Candidates need to be clear that the two are entirely separate.

Candidates who paid attention to key terms in the question, and had thought about how an audience sitting in a theatre would be likely to think and feel at given moments in the play fared well.

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 reiterated points already made could have been better used to give a wider range of ideas or more detailed analysis.

### **Comments on specific questions**

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

##### **Question 1**

This was the most popular text and question this series. Most candidates recognised it was a crucial part of the play from the tense dialogue and dramatic conflict between Ann and Sue. The best answers identified Sue's comments which cause tension: her request of the 'small favor' that Ann and Chris move away after their marriage, and the revelation that everyone knows that 'Joe pulled a fast one to get out of jail.' Many candidates identified how Miller achieved his effects using stage directions and language. The patronising language Sue uses calling Ann 'Dear' and 'Darling', and the religious imagery of 'the hair shirt' and 'Holy Family', featured in these responses. Stronger answers related the passage to the wider context of the play: the importance of money, the American Dream, and idealism and materialism, showing awareness of the similarities between Sue and Joe. Less confident candidates showed little overall understanding of what was being discussed in the passage, suggesting Sue and Jim simply disliked Ann and Chris. They identified Miller's methods, supporting them with some relevant reference and quotation but without exploring them in the context of the passage. Candidates who simply focused on identifying stage directions, exclamation marks, question marks and ellipsis, without commenting on what Sue and Ann were actually discussing, were unable to achieve high reward.

##### **Question 2**

This was a less popular question. The best answers acknowledged the complexities of Kate's character and the real reasons for her expressing hope that Larry is alive – if she accepts he is dead, then Joe killed him through his part in the faulty cylinders. They considered Miller's methods in creating sympathy for a 'mother', her grief for the loss her son, and were able to balance this against the consequences – her refusal to accept Chris and Ann's marriage, and covering up Joe's guilt. The strongest answers saw her behaviour as reprehensible in the imprisonment of an innocent man, Steve Deever, her manipulation of George, and her awareness of Joe's crime (telling him to 'be smart') whilst simultaneously denying Chris and Ann happiness. Less high achieving responses were narrative, writing all about Kate and her part in the play – simply asserting in their conclusions that she was to be sympathised with, rather than analysing how the audience's sympathy is generated, or not, throughout the play.

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

##### **Question 3**

This was a very popular question. Some candidates seemed unaware of the meaning of 'suspense' and worked chronologically through the passage, relying on narration and paraphrase to show knowledge of the play. Most candidates were able to comment on the Inspector's methods of interrogating Sheila, the secrecy of showing the photo, and Sheila's dramatic running off stage. Key features often explored were the Inspector's gradual revelation of details, Sheila's dawning realisation of her involvement, and the warning contained in the Inspector's final words in the extract about who had 'made a mess' of a life. Stronger answers were clear on Priestley's socialist stance and how he transmitted that into the play, and supported their points with carefully selected quotation from the passage.

##### **Question 4**

Most candidates focused on the key word of the question, 'contrast', to choose moments of conflict between Mr and Mrs Birling and Sheila and Eric. The best answers also focused on 'dramatic effect', made reference to the behaviour and language used by the different generations, and acknowledged their frustrations and sense of powerlessness to change the other. Exploration of how Priestley conveyed his socialist message and how Eric and Sheila were the 'nation's future hope', in contrast with the older generation, were features of the best responses. Weaker responses identified members of each generation and narrated what they did to Eva, often without textual support and with no reference to the drama this created in the play.

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

**Question 5**

This was a more popular choice than Question 6. The most confident candidates conveyed understanding of the context of the passage, explored the playfulness and shift in focus from classical allusion to reality, and the significance of Stephano setting up the denouement. Some wrote knowledgeably about the mythological references, exploring the complexity of the relationship between Jessica and Lorenzo and the romantic setting and atmosphere. The strongest answers analysed the language and rhythmic structure of the passage with the repetition of, 'on such a night' and the romantic setting of Belmont, whilst conveying concern for Portia and Nerissa who were returning to confront Bassanio and Gratiano after the trial and acquisition of their rings. Some mentioned the style with reference to iambic pentameter, and the prose/poetry, but very few explored the effects created effectively. Less confident candidates showed some understanding of the scene with generalisations about what was happening and an awareness of context. Some of these approached the question from a director's perspective on how to direct or stage the scene, rather than analysing the text. Only the very best answers explored the humour and change in mood brought about by the arrival of Stephano and Launcelot.

**Question 6**

Many responses were discursive and described the experience of opening the caskets, and the reactions of the Prince of Morocco, Prince of Arragon and Bassanio, without evaluating how the testing was 'entertaining' or 'significant'. Most candidates understood Portia's father had devised the testing but only the highest achieving explored his intentions in doing so, evaluating the significance of the metals the caskets were made of, and their content. The strongest responses knew the text well, considered the significance of the testing as a catalyst to the plot, and supported comments on Portia's views of the suitors, explicitly addressing the terms of the question. Some candidates criticised Portia for what were perceived as her racist views of her suitor, failing to engage with her wit and the stereotyping she engages in to make the testing so 'entertaining' for the audience.

**WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Henry V***

**Question 7**

Too few answers were submitted to make comment appropriate.

**Question 8**

Too few answers were submitted to make comment appropriate.

**J LAWRENCE and R E LEE: *Inherit the Wind***

**Question 9**

This was not a very popular text. Most candidates who wrote on this text chose this question. Less confident candidates showed some knowledge and understanding of the text. They explained who Brady is, what he is doing in Hillsboro, and the theories of evolution and creationism with little focus on the question or passage. The best answers addressed 'dramatic', exploring the celebratory welcome song, the 'carnival' atmosphere with banners, and the ceremonial photograph. The writing was analysed in depth as was the dramatic impact of the introduction, with contrasts drawn between the introduction of Drummond and Brady and the clear understanding that this would be a difficult case for Drummond to win. The most insightful candidates emphasised Brady's high opinion of himself, and the certainty that he is right, as being the cause of his own downfall and death later in the play.

**Question 10**

Very few candidates responded to this question. Weaker answers retold the story. They identified the people as creationists, explained 'the buckle on the bible belt' and what Cates did, without considering how difficult it was to get a verdict against such a formidable united front of people. The best responses considered the biased atmosphere created by Hillsboro and how seriously the people took religion, making it a very intimidating trial for both Cates and the audience.

# LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

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Paper 0486/32  
Drama (Open Text) 32

## Key messages

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- Most responses would have been improved by more detailed knowledge of the text and an ability to use direct quotations from it
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The strongest responses understood terms of the genre such as 'suspense' and 'dramatic irony', used a wide range of material, avoided using the passage from the previous question in the answer and resisted re-telling the narrative. There were a few responses this session, especially on *The Merchant of Venice*, where candidates thought the discursive question related to the passage set for the passage question. Candidates need to be clear that the two are entirely separate.

Candidates who paid attention to key terms in the question, and had thought about how an audience sitting in a theatre would be likely to think and feel at given moments in the play fared well.



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 reiterated points already made could have been better used to give a wider range of ideas or more detailed analysis.

### **Comments on specific questions**

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

##### **Question 1**

Candidates tackled this question either as an audience member who was as yet unaware of Joe's guilt, or with an overview of the play as a whole. Either approach was acceptable and answers were generally competent and relevant. Strong responses explored how Joe is 'being smart' here, aiming to disarm George and manipulate him into thinking that he cares about Steve. The contradictory strand of the dialogue where he piles guilt onto Steve and doubt onto George drew comment from most candidates. Joe's hypocrisy and the irony of his comments on accepting blame were fully appreciated in sound responses. The best answers gave the personal response the question required, showed a keen awareness of the ironies, and supported points fully from the passage. Less successful answers often selected key points but did not support them from the passage, or did not focus firmly on the question of how Miller's portrayal made them feel about Joe. There were a few responses which took Joe's words at face value or which misunderstood the context.

##### **Question 2**

Most candidates understood that the relationship between Kate and Ann played a central and major part in the play. The strongest answers explored this in dramatic terms rather than narrating the course of their relationship. The tensions between Ann and Kate caused by Ann's arrival, her contrasting response to Larry's disappearance, her relationship with Chris and George's intervention were explored, along with Ann's climactic revelation of Larry's letter and its powerfully dramatic consequences. An inability to refer closely to any of these powerful moments prevented many answers from achieving high marks. Several responses assumed that Ann's knowledge of the letter meant she thought Joe was guilty all along, whereas the play makes it clear that she, like George, until recently accepted their father's guilt.

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

##### **Question 3**

Many candidates showed an awareness of the drama created by Priestley's suggestion that the Inspector has foreknowledge of Mrs Birling's involvement, the Inspector's emotive presentation of Eva's plight, Sheila's forceful response, and the conflict created between family members. The most assured answers explored Mrs Birling's snobbery and evasiveness, the Inspector's tone, his blunt and persistent questioning, and the powerful dramatic irony of Sybil Birling not realising that she is talking about her own son. Less successful answers seemed unaware of the exact context, and were diverted into discussing the 'responsibility' theme rather than focussing sharply on the drama of this moment. Some spent too much time on how Mrs Birling has responded to the Inspector earlier in the play and, while this made a relevant point about contrast, it meant that the passage was often not explored in sufficient detail.

##### **Question 4**

This question produced a wide variety of responses, some of which seemed to have a far kinder view of Gerald than Priestley had perhaps intended. The most focussed responses selected material which reflected his role in the play. They balanced Gerald's kindness to Eva and regret over his treatment of her with his deception of Sheila, and his ultimate siding with the older generation in denial of responsibility. Confident answers supported their views with comment on how Gerald sides with Birling against the factory workers, hopes that his affair with Eva/ Daisy will not be revealed, and assumes that Sheila will still want to marry him at the end of the play. Some answers spent too long establishing his status or conveyed a strong response to him without supporting this by close textual reference. Less successful responses tended to make sweeping assertions, ignoring his genuine care for Eva/Daisy, for example, or conversely omitting any reference to his disloyalty and deceit. Insightful answers recognised that there is some complexity in the portrayal.

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

**Question 5**

The majority of candidates made central comments on Shylock's intransigence, and Antonio's fatalism and love for Bassanio. Developed responses supported this by looking at Shylock's merciless stance, his unwillingness to speak to Antonio, his mockery of the fool who lends out money gratis, his repetitive language, and the undertones of religious conflict. They interpreted Antonio's tone as desperate and pleading rather than polite and regretful, and saw that he had given up and had no hope that the law would save him. Less sharply focussed answers mistook the context as the trial scene and asserted that Antonio regrets what he has done to Shylock in the past (a misunderstanding of: '*I oft have delivered from his forfeitures/Many that have at times made moan to me*'). Such responses spent too much time explaining the narrative context, or wrote little about Antonio and too much about Shylock's hatred of Antonio and the extent to which it is justified, with evidence from earlier in the play. Focus on the passage itself and exploration of Antonio's realism about the law and the state to which he has been reduced by his 'griefs and losses' were often the hallmark of a successful response.

**Question 6**

The most confident responses to this question chose their moments carefully and referred to them closely. The various casket choosing scenes and the trial were the most popular and successful selection, though some made a good case for Jessica's elopement or, to a lesser degree, the ring scenes. Developed answers commented on how the suspense was created, took the perspective of an audience, and referred closely to their chosen moments. Although most candidates chose effectively, their exploration of the moments and use of textual support could have been considerably improved. Many lost valuable time writing out the inscriptions on the three caskets, presumably because they had learned them, but made no response to the suspense. A few comments on Portia's 'quality of mercy' speech, her agreeing that the bond is valid and Shylock's sharpening his blade and preparing his scales, for example, would have made many inadequate answers perfectly competent.

**WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Henry V***

**Question 7**

Effective answers looked both at the striking nature of the situation, an anointed King in disguise speaking to common soldiers, and the striking language of Williams' speech about war and its consequences. For example: '*The use of the word 'raw' (in 'rawly left') creates a sense that the subject for their children is a painful one, similar to that of a raw wound*'. There was some exploration of the ideas of humanity of kings and the extent to which the foot soldiers share the guilt of a dishonourable cause. The dramatic irony of the men unknowingly criticising the King was appreciated. Less successful answers focussed almost exclusively on the situation without exploring the passage in sufficient detail.

**Question 8**

The majority of candidates who answered this question could see that the English lesson scene and Henry's wooing of Katherine were entertaining, but could not give sufficient detail from the scenes to prove their point. Many answers concentrated solely on the fact that Katherine's betrothal to Henry was political and that she was a woman in a largely male dominated cast. Neither of these points went very far in helping them to answer the question.

**J LAWRENCE AND R E LEE: *Inherit the Wind***

**Question 9**

This question was generally answered with some competence. Candidates commented on the importance of the visual representation of the town in the set, the introduction of the main themes of the play through Howard and Melinda, and the intrigue caused by Rachel's furtive arrival at the jail. Candidates seemed well-prepared to discuss the functions of an opening to a play and understood what was required of them. As always, those who supported their points fully from the passage fared better than those who did not.

### Question 10

Most candidates chose to take a thematic view, and explored how Brady's downfall meant an end to fundamentalism and hope for more freedom of thought. The 'Golden Dancer' symbol was cited as representing Brady, who seemed everything on the outside but on the inside proved to be broken and hollow. There was, therefore, a stronger focus on 'significant' than 'dramatic'. Some candidates looked in detail at how Drummond demolished Brady in the court, and many commented on his followers deserting him and the embarrassing reciting of his presidential speech. A balanced concentration on drama as well as theme would have improved several responses.

# LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

Paper 0486/33  
Drama (Open Text) 33

## Key messages

- Close attention to the detail of the set text is the primary characteristic of successful answers, and the careful use of brief, apt and well-integrated quotation is the key component of this close attention
- The most accomplished answers to extract-based questions start by quickly locating the extract in the context of the whole play, and then develop by concentrating on the detail of the printed extract
- The highest achieving candidates see the texts as scripts for performance and try to visualise the onstage action
- Candidates need to focus more clearly on the language of the dialogue. Excessive concentration on the wording of stage directions or the writer's use of punctuation is generally unhelpful.

## General comments

The best introductory paragraphs focus clearly on the terms of the question and begin to develop specific ideas, avoiding unhelpful generalisations, biographical details or lists of generic techniques. Sweeping comments on the writer's use of "dialogue, stage directions, punctuation...", or even just "language", hamper swift engagement with the selected question and text.

The best approach to extract-based questions is to establish the dramatic context for the prescribed passage in terms of the concerns of the characters on stage and the audience's overview of the evolving action at this point in the play, and then devote the bulk of the answer to discussing, quoting from and commenting on the printed extract itself.

The most effective answers to discursive questions stay anchored to the terms of the question throughout and select detailed and specific support for their arguments. In questions demanding the selection of particular "moments" (**Questions 2 and 8**), a sharp focus on the detail of a clearly-defined incident or specific section of dialogue is the key to success.

The tendency to use labels ("capitalist / socialist... the American Dream ...social responsibility ...foreshadowing...cliff-hanger...dramatic irony...") as if they speak for themselves and require no further explanation or exemplification restricted the development of some promising ideas. Similarly, some formulaic feature-logging approaches whereby candidates worked through a checklist of generic headings ("dialogue...stage directions...punctuation...language features...") tended to distance them from the dramatic impact of their selected play, and to convey little sense of them enjoying a theatrical experience. Lengthy digressions about the responses of different audiences (Elizabethan, Post-WW2...) also tended to obscure the candidate's own response, at times.

## Comments on specific questions

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

#### **Question 1**

There were many fine answers to this very popular question. Candidates often engaged closely with the complex and intense feelings of both characters, and clearly identified Chris's determination to marry Annie and perhaps to leave the business as the source of dramatic conflict not only in this scene, but also in

scenes to come. Chris's uncharacteristic anger, frustration and decisiveness, and Keller's shock and desperation were often thoughtfully handled, with some close attention to the escalating tensions conveyed through Keller's anxious questioning and movements. The most accomplished answers avoided simplification and suggested that Keller is not just acting as a loyal husband and devoted father in this scene, but is also intent on self-preservation and concealing his own guilt in conspiring with Kate in the delusion that Larry is still alive. The intensity of Keller's feelings in the gesture of putting "a fist up to CHRIS's jaw" was often sensitively handled, though the extent of the physical violence involved was occasionally exaggerated. The ironic resonance of Keller's repeated words to his son about the business, "for you", was also thoughtfully picked up, and related to the climactic scene at the end of Act Two when Keller's guilt is finally revealed to Chris. Some candidates thought that Keller is referring to Annie, rather than Kate, when he says "She thinks he's coming back" and others were uncertain about the context and insisted that the audience is already convinced of Keller's guilt. Some were so intent on logging the number of interruptions, questions, ellipses...that they remained detached from the evolving action and the sources of conflict. Others insisted that Annie is Larry's wife.

## Question 2

There was a range of convincingly "disturbing" moments provided by the candidates. The most popular and successful selections included Sue's acerbic conversation with Annie, Keller's barefaced manipulation of George, Kate's reading of Larry's letter to Annie, the confrontation between Keller and Chris after the revelation of Keller's guilt, and the impact of Keller's suicide at the end of the play. The most confident candidates were able to balance their time thoughtfully between the two clearly-defined moments, explore the specific detail and context for each moment, and focus explicitly on the disturbing elements. Less successful candidates chose moments which merged into each other, or became so sprawling that they appeared to occupy a whole Act and led to a rather generalised discussion as a result. Some candidates were distracted by thematic concerns, most notably "social responsibility", as if they were answering a different question.

## J B PRIESTLEY: *An Inspector Calls*

### Question 3

The power of the play's final scene was convincingly conveyed by many candidates in response to this very popular question. The contrasting reactions to the revelation of the "hoax" (and particularly the tension between Sheila and Mr Birling) were often explored in detail, and there was much thoughtful speculation about the timing and significance of the phone call, and its impact on both the characters and the audience. The most confident candidates traced not only the detail of the characters' contrasting reactions, but also the rapid shifts in mood, the impact of the sharp ring of the telephone (often linking this to the sharp ring of the doorbell in Act One), and the suspense as we hear one side of the telephone conversation and await Mr Birling's explanation. Less successful candidates tended to dive into the extract without suggesting an understanding of Gerald's call to the Infirmary (or Birling's to Colonel Roberts) and were therefore unable to place Birling's tone of triumph and relief in any kind of context; or were lured away from the dramatic impact of the scene on an audience by lengthy thematic discussions of social responsibility, the generational divide, capitalism versus socialism and so on. Answers tended to be overly dominated by Mr Birling or Sheila, as if they are the only two characters on stage, and the effect of Gerald's untimely production of the engagement ring seldom received attention. Some candidates were uncertain about what exactly "frightens" Sheila and Eric.

### Question 4

Answers to this popular question were notable for their wide-ranging textual knowledge and the strength of the personal response to the Birlings. The best avoided the drift into lengthy narrative accounts of the culpability of each family member in the story of Eva Smith / Daisy Renton, and engaged fully with the Birlings "as a family" by exploring their dysfunctional relationships with each other. The portrayal of Mr Birling as the kind of father in whom his son is unable to confide – and who is more interested in business relationships than his daughter's happiness – was often thoughtfully explored. Similarly Mrs Birling's foolish attempts to protect Sheila from the reality of the outside world, her inability to recognise Eric's problem with drink and even her responsibility for the death of her own grandchild, were often intelligently cited as evidence of parental failings, alongside some well selected evidence of tensions between husband and wife, and, initially, between brother and sister. Many candidates responded very strongly and personally to the self-centred materialism of the family, the lack of understanding and affection between the parents and children, and the emergence of their contrasting values by the end of the play. Less successful candidates

missed the family focus of the question and provided four individual character studies, or an answer entirely devoted to the themes of social responsibility and the generational divide.

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

**Question 5**

This was probably the most popular question across the three components, and many candidates managed the difficult feat of balancing their attention to the dramatic context and evolving situation with very close attention to the detail of the printed extract and features of the verse. The highest achieving candidates were aware of our foreknowledge of Antonio's perilous situation, so that we await the impact of his letter on Bassanio and on the celebratory mood of the lovers in Belmont. There was much intelligent exploration of the building of suspense through Salerio's cryptic responses to Bassanio and Gratiano, through Portia's concerned description of Bassanio's loss of colour and morbid speculation, through Bassanio's desperate questioning, and through the delay in revealing the full contents of the letter. The candidates' commentary on Bassanio's dramatic personification of the paper and on Salerio's portrayal of Shylock's inhuman malevolence was often sensitive and well developed. Most candidates fully grasped the seriousness of Antonio's predicament. Some found difficulty in understanding the exact nature of Bassanio's "confession" to Portia, suggesting that he had boasted of his vast riches in wooing her, or that he is now pleading for her help, and others thought they were already married at this point. Portia's touching concern for Bassanio and willingness to share his difficulties tended to be overlooked. The bond was occasionally characterised as a wager, and, at times, there was a tendency to drift from the detail of the extract and to launch into unhelpful discussions of the nature of Antonio's feelings for Bassanio or of anti-semitism, though the need for Gratiano to urge Nerissa to welcome Jessica was rarely addressed.

**Question 6**

There were a few outstanding answers to this question which focused on the idea of "enjoyment", and developed a clear and detailed view of the effect of contrast between the two locations. Venice was often seen as the serious world of business, dominated by men and beset by conflict and suspicion, with Belmont as the fairytale world of romance, music, comedy and happy resolutions. More subtle answers moved this argument on to suggest overlap in the portrayal of repressive fathers and in the evidence of racism and deception in both locations. However, some candidates lost contact with the question and simply recounted what happens in each location or drifted so far away from the detail of the text that the answers resembled generalised travel or historical guides to canals, trade and ghettos, rather than a close reading of the play.

**WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Henry V***

**Question 7**

Most candidates were able to respond in some way to the power and violence of Henry's language, and the most accomplished answers contained much close attention to features like the barbarity of the imagery, the insistent questioning which places responsibility on the Governor of Harfleur, the biblical allusions, and the final rhyming couplet. A variety of impressions of Henry's determined leadership were suggested but the highest achieving candidates, whilst aware of his ruthlessness elsewhere in the play, saw his vicious threats as strategic bluffs designed to avoid bloodshed, and that the subtle purpose of his rhetorical flourishes was to manipulate the Governor. Less confident candidates tended to take his words at face value and to suggest that he was some kind of Herod-figure, personally intent on violating and murdering the innocents of Harfleur, rather than a leader trying to contain the worst instincts of his men.

**Question 8**

This question was rarely attempted, but several answers suggested genuine engagement with the play. The most popular and successful selections tended to be the scenes involving Katherine or the Eastcheap crew, though the "tennis balls" moment also received some thoughtful attention. The most confident candidates were able to identify clearly-defined moments and refer in detail to entertaining features, including some impressively specific comments on language. Some found "entertaining" to be rather an elusive term and appeared to be shoe-horning prepared material on the role of the Chorus or the impact of Henry's rhetoric in key speeches (including, occasionally, the printed passage for **Question 7**) into their answers. Nevertheless, most candidates managed to demonstrate their enjoyment of the play and to convey broadly entertaining effects.



**J LAWRENCE and R E LEE: *Inherit the Wind***

**Question 9**

This text has attracted a small but enthusiastic following, and the majority of these candidates tackled this climactic courtroom scene. The highest achieving candidates fully understood the pivotal nature of this moment and the power shift from Brady to Drummond, and looked in detail at the impact of this confrontation between the play's two heavyweights, both on the audience within the courtroom and the broader theatre audience. As with all extract-based questions, an awareness of context was a key component of successful answers and the candidates who could focus on Brady's growing hesitancy and desperation in relation to the pomposity and confidence he has displayed hitherto, or rejoice in the triumph of Drummond's rational enquiries about the age of the Earth after the rejection by the court of all expert testimony on evolution, produced highly effective answers. The increasing pace of Drummond's questions, the laughter in the courtroom, the evidence of Brady's discomfiture, and Davenport's panicky attempt to intervene were often addressed as key features of the scene's effect. Less confident candidates tended to take the dramatic context and the subject matter of the dialogue as read, and to remain detached from the characters or the scene as a theatrical experience by concentrating exclusively on the stage directions or the number of question marks.

**Question 10**

This question was a minority choice but most candidates fully understood the courageous nature of Bert's stand, and the central function of his case in providing the battleground for competing ideologies. The most insightful candidates looked in some detail at the rounded portrayal of Bert as heroic but also as a shy, modest, fearful character, thrust into reluctant action by his belief in the freedom of thought and his concern for others, most notably Rachel and Tommy Stebbins. Less confident candidates tended to overlook his ordinariness and human frailties, and to characterise him as simply heroic. Others drifted away from the question and tended to concentrate exclusively on what Bert stands for and thematic concerns, so that the answers became dominated by explorations of the freedom of thought in collision with narrow-minded bigotry, or by the character of Drummond rather than Cates.

# LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

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Paper 0486/41  
Unseen 41

## Key messages

- Careful reading of the rubric, question and bullet points should help to avoid misunderstandings
- Opening paragraphs should express an overview of the whole text, and not simply repeat the words of the rubric and question or list rhetorical devices
- Stronger responses achieve a balance between all the Assessment Objectives: knowledge, understanding, comment on language and personal response; comment on language needs to be linked to effect on the reader and overall interpretation
- In this series, some responses were too short to show developed understanding
- Both poetry and prose responses would improve with greater focus on form and structure, rather than content.

## General comments

The standard of average responses in this series for this paper continues to improve, and there is plenty of evidence that candidates are well-prepared, interpret texts in ways which go beyond surface meaning, understand a range of ways in which writers achieve their effects, and are thus able to communicate their appreciation of texts in a variety of forms. There were few responses which did not show at least basic knowledge of the surface meaning of the texts, and most communicated some original and individual argument. There were some responses, especially to prose questions, which struggled to communicate much more than a broad narrative paraphrase, but most addressed the writing itself, and its impact on the reader through deliberate authorial effect. The strongest responses were highly impressive: they showed careful selection and interpretation of detail, clear critical engagement with imagery and language thus achieving an appreciation of how the texts worked, with a focused response to the question.

Attention to the question is essential for a successful response. The question is carefully designed to address how the writing works, and makes a text memorable or vivid for the reader. Good responses therefore consider the connection between the style and structure of the writing and the emotive effect on the reader, and do not merely recount the content of a text. In this series, prose passages proved a more popular choice than in some previous years, but it is especially important when writing about prose to address form, language and structural choices by the writer, and not just the narrative and characters. Misunderstandings about meaning should be avoided by careful reading of the rubric which precedes the question. If there are characters whose names and identities need to be explained, that explanation will be in the rubric. The rubric, or the bullet points which follow the stem question, will explain the gender and relationships of poet, writer, narrator and characters. We also aim to explain any vocabulary which is unusual or used in an idiomatic way, or any textual references which depend on their cultural context. This is in order that candidates can focus on the writing itself in their responses, and not be distracted by aspects of cultural or social context which are extrinsic to the passage itself. We are also careful to include texts from a very wide range of cultural contexts: in this series African-American, Scottish, 1930s and 1980s English texts, Indian and recent British fiction featured, with a good balance of writing by men and women representing the diversity of Literature in English. We will also include pre-twentieth century texts and literary non-fiction from time to time.

The stem question is in bold and allows the candidate to address all the Assessment Objectives, which are equally weighted. Good answers need to balance surface knowledge of what a text is about with deeper understanding of its implications and mood. Knowledge about the language and techniques used by writers

needs to be balanced against an appreciation of how they contribute towards the power of the text's impact on an independent reader. Therefore an introduction which simply lists all the rhetorical devices which are (or are not) present in the passage does not answer the question. Nor does an introduction which simply copies out the words of the question, rubric and bullet points with only minimal input from the candidate provide an examiner with much to reward. Essays will improve if candidates are encouraged to write introductions which convey an overall grasp of the whole text, both what it is about and its effect on the reader.

It is easier to get a grasp on a whole text if it is first divided into sections. Poetry divided into verses or prose divided into paragraphs can make it easier to appreciate how a passage is structured, but any passage will begin by introducing its ideas and characters, develop them in interesting ways, and reach an endpoint which is thought-provoking for the reader. Candidates might begin their responses more effectively if they are encouraged to divide their texts into sections first, and achieve some understanding of how texts develop and where they will end before writing anything. This is more likely to lead to an opening sentence which shows insight and understanding.

Most candidates find the bullet points very helpful in structuring their answers and often follow them carefully with simply a brief introduction and conclusion of their own. This is a valid approach and has led to some high achieving responses: the bullet points suggest particular aspects of language and form which candidates can focus on at first, and then hint at ways in which passages develop. The final bullet point is intended to encourage an evaluative approach, often beginning with the ending of the text. It assists a personal response to the whole text. However, it is not necessary to address the bullet points explicitly or slavishly or even to address them in the order on the paper. Candidates should not be afraid to express their own overview of the text before exploring their impressions in greater critical detail, and it might be a good idea to consider the form, genre and structure of the whole text before exploring its individual elements in sequence. Some candidates did not demonstrate overall understanding of the text until the very end of their answers, and some were uncomfortable with texts which are ambiguous in tone or meaning. At IGCSE, texts chosen will have a degree of complexity or uncertainty which candidates can explore in their own way. However, the answers to interpretative questions are in the texts themselves, and not outside them.

To practise interpretation, it is essential that candidates are introduced to a wide range of texts with suitable complexity, individuality and interest: the past papers on the Teacher Support website provide a very good teaching resource, especially when aided by these reports which always provide more detailed commentary on individual questions and what high achieving candidates found to write about them. For higher marks, it is essential to show understanding of each section of the text and how it develops, with some extended comment on language and techniques and their effects: it is difficult to do this in fewer than two sides of writing and most strong responses are three or four sides in length, with appropriate development and illustration of an argument which was clearly set out in the introductory paragraph.

### **Comments on specific questions**

#### **Question 1**

'Life is Fine' by Langston Hughes attracted a broad range of responses and although its qualities as poetry were not always explored in great depth, many candidates found the situation that it addressed very accessible.

Candidates seemed to engage with the whole idea of feeling you could 'die for love' and then coming to your senses and deciding to live. As always, the key discriminator was in the candidates' ability to explore the writer's use of language and structure and to go beyond simple paraphrase to offer a more developed interpretation of text.

Most candidates noted the form of the poem, divided into three distinct sections and many commented on the repeated lines of 'refrain' in between each pair of 'defining' stanzas. More confident answers developed these comments into fuller explorations of the musicality of the structure, which a handful recognised as having the rhythms and imagery of a blues lyric. Other candidates recognised the song-like format of the poem but were less sensitive to its genre; quite often commenting on similarities between the poem and a 'nursery-rhyme', but without adequate support offered for this idea.

Many candidates responded to the poet's use of repetition as a device to illuminate the journey of the persona from despair to defiance, or from pessimism to optimism, depending on the precise reading of the persona's mood. Some candidates discussed the simplicity of the diction used and the effect of the adoption of dialect words, which help to convey a sense of 'ordinariness' even in the quite extreme state of suicidal despair.

Repetitions that attracted most attention included the repeated personal pronoun (which some saw as evidence of the persona's egotism and a reason for the loss of his 'baby'), the repeated exclamation marks and the repeated phrases, such as, 'I stood there', 'I hollered', 'I cried'. More developed answers looked at the variants within these 'repeated phrases' and were able to trace some kind of progression from unthinking numbness, to thoughtful pain and then to acceptance and release.

Many candidates described the rhyme scheme and pointed out the unusual use of single lines, but far fewer were able convincingly to suggest ways in which these technical features contributed to tone or to the development of meaning.

Some made perceptive reference to the change of tense in the final section of the poem and they noted the overall jaunty mood of the poem, in contrast to its serious subject matter. Tone proved a stumbling block to some candidates, however, who insisted on labelling the stanzas that report on the aborted suicide attempts as 'depressing' or 'sombre' despite the life-affirming rhythms used by the poet.

A significant number of candidates remarked upon the poet's choice of spacing between the words in the refrain, as printed on the paper; but few offered convincing interpretations of what this spacing might be signifying for the poet. Higher achieving candidates linked this typographical feature to the 'Chorus' like quality of a song and even imagined the 'reader/listener' of the poem being invited to 'join in' with the refrain; encouraged to do so by the gaps left in the metrical line.

A number of candidates commented on the unorthodox syntactical sequencing of words in the third phase of the poet's experience; a device which some candidates identified as 'hyperbaton' and most appreciated as a method employed to emphasise the speaker's new understanding of his purpose in life. Whatever words they chose to describe this literary device, more confident candidates were able to point out how the use of an unusual word order helped to communicate the speaker's new insight or 'epiphany'.

Many candidates were able to recognise the narrator's progression from apparent despair at the beginning of the poem to elation at the end, but only the most insightful candidates were able to analyse the poet's methods in revealing this progression. For example, many responses considered the way in which, even from the first stanza, the speaker seemed to be finding excuses to stay alive. A number of candidates commented perceptively on how the persona's inability to think before he threw himself into the river, developed into a more controlled thought process as he stood on the top of a high building. Candidates sometimes commented on the river and the high building as representative of the 'highs' and 'lows' experienced in life.

There was also some thoughtful comment on the ways in which stanzas mirrored each other in their structure, and how this actually helped to underline the changes in what the speaker was thinking and feeling. Several candidates commented on the newly sarcastic tone that accompanied the speaker's direct address to his 'sweet baby' in the final stanza.

The title of the poem was often overlooked. When candidates did reflect meaningfully upon the significance of the title, they often referred to the assertion 'life is fine' as a somewhat 'lukewarm' affirmation of satisfaction, although this was not a universal interpretation. There were some intelligent readings of the title as a fitting preparation for the poet's apparent *volte face* in stanzas five and six.

Some candidates adopted a tone of moral censure about the poet's conclusion that life is 'Fine as wine!' evincing some concern that the persona, having failed to drown himself in the river, had resorted to another form of drowning – alcoholism.

Candidates were often divided about the gender of the persona, despite this being indicated in the question itself and there was some confusion about the term, 'baby' despite the gloss. These are the kinds of errors that would not occur if candidates thoroughly read the question, the bullet points and any gloss offered before beginning to write. A small number of candidates failed to pick up on the clearly conveyed information that 'baby' referred to a lover, and mused empathetically on the love of a mother for a child. It was hard to square this particular circle with the detail of the text, but candidates often tried although the narratives invented to support such a reading were rarely convincing or supported with evidence from the text.

More ambitious responses went beyond a literal reading of the opening stanzas. The cold water into which the speaker threw himself was seen as a metaphor for the coldness of the relationship to which he had committed himself, and the high building became an image of the giddy uncertainties of love. One or two candidates took a different slant on the speaker's new optimism in the final stanza, seeing it as the false front

of a man trying unsuccessfully to convince himself that his pain was over. Some misread the tone of the last stanza and suggested that the persona wanted to protect his 'baby' from the guilt that would result from her seeing him 'die'.

Many candidates worked their way through the poem in a methodical way, but higher achieving candidates did not start to write before they had worked out the persona's mental journey from a sense of rejection to one of triumph.

## Question 2

The extract was taken from Jeanette Winterson's historical fantasy, *The Passion*, published in 1987. The question asked candidates to explore the ways in which the writer creates a sense of mystery both about the city and about its inhabitants. The bullet points highlighted the narrator's use of stories and legends as well as inviting candidates to consider the effect of the final story which leads to the personal revelation.

Not all candidates who tackled this question appeared to have read the question and the associated information/bullets with sufficient care and many answers did not make adequate use of the guidance offered. Although complete paraphrases were rare, many answers were seen which simply narrated the 'contents' of each succeeding paragraph. Such answers attract little credit. There were some very impressive answers seen, however, where candidates appeared fully engaged with the mysterious city.

Some candidates commented on the fact that the city is never named, others assumed that it did have a name, 'the city of mazes', and several candidates identified the 'watery alleys' with a mythologised version of Venice; though rarefied, or transported to a dystopian future. Others felt that the level of superstition and of ruin pointed rather to a lost civilization with the occasional speculation that the city had been reached by means of a 'time machine'. Although inventive, this suggestion was not supported by any concrete evidence from the passage.

More confident answers looked at the repeated examples of the impossible. One of the most frequently quoted lines being, 'Although wherever you are going is always in front of you, there is no such thing as straight ahead'. Candidates often took this sentence as the key to the mystery of the city, where both science and logic have become redundant and where only 'faith' is operative. Although there were candidates who wrote very short answers – some consisting almost exclusively of rhetorical questions, such as 'How can this be?' or 'isn't this crazy?' there were many painstaking explorations of the writer's methods to be seen. Insightful answers focused on the writer's use of the vocative case drawing the reader into the passage and the city. Some commented on the disorienting, rather than comforting, effect of such an approach.

Candidates frequently spent a lot of time and attention on the first six paragraphs, as they tried to work themselves into the mystery. They wrote enthusiastically about the writer's choice of 'peopling' the city with rats and cats and describing 'a hundred eyes' that appeared to be completely disembodied, guarding what is described as 'a filthy palace of sacks and bones'. Many speculated on why such a palace would need to be guarded, while others imagined where the bones had come from and what was in the sacks.

More developed answers remarked on the writer's use of short sentences alternating with more syntactically complex ones – many likened this approach to the construction of a literary maze. These answers paid meticulous attention to the writer's choice of diction.

Some candidates noted the frequent references to routes, navigation and modes of transport – walking, rowing, flying – lending the passage a sense of perpetual motion which added to the disorienting effect of a city that is 'constantly changing'. There were also some perceptive comments made about the integration of the animal kingdom into the city; including fish, crow and hound, as well as the cats and the rats, making the webbed feet of the boatmen a natural extension of the infiltration of creatures into a city where ordinary humans appeared to be in the minority.

Many were puzzled by the fortune teller. A few candidates gave detailed consideration to the implications of a world that seemed to depend on mystical powers, superstition and ritual rather than on common sense or empiricism. In their consideration of the legends described in the passage, less accomplished answers tended to consist of a simple re-telling of the main features. More confident candidates focused on the idea of ritual and perhaps considered what meanings the ritual might represent. Perceptive candidates commented that the city appeared to be divided along clearly delineated gender roles. Some wondered at the desirability of 'boatman's feet' for a baby boy, suggesting that the trade of 'boatman' must either hold much prestige in the city or must be a lucrative occupation. The desirability of a 'clean heart' for a girl also

attracted some attention and prompted consideration of the potentially 'sexist' (some said 'primitive') nature of the community in the city.

Higher achieving answers explored the significance of the language used – the gothic features of the island, the mystery implied by 'the limbless ones'. Few attempted to engage with the possible 'meaning' of the 'offerings' that had to be left on the grave of the 'most recently dead' but there were exceptions, and some interesting speculation was seen about the religious connotations of the 'flask of wine' (blood of Christ) and the 'silver coin' (Judas' payment) which was linked back to the importance of 'faith' in the city. The many churches in the city, the priests, and the references to mass were effectively cited to support these readings.

Similarly, when considering the story of the boatman, confident answers commented on the gaps in the story and the mystery these created. Some commented on how the sentence structure built up suspense and how, especially, the one-line paragraphs were ambiguous. They questioned, for example, whether, paragraph six which consisted only of the phrase, 'This is the Legend', summed up the previous five paragraphs or introduced the seventh. These candidates also noted the frequent use of negatives, 'No', 'not', 'never' and associated this feature with the lack of plausibility both of the city and of its stories and legends. There were also some thoughtful comments on how the revelation that the boatman was the narrator's father forced the reader to reconsider their response to what they had read, increased the sense of mystery and created new questions about the nature of the narrator.

The sentence, towards the end of the passage, 'There was no boatman' puzzled many candidates, even those who had made a valiant attempt to unravel meaning in the earlier part of the passage. Rather than reading the phrase in the context of the discovery of the abandoned boat, occupied only by the crazed tourist, many candidates read it as a complete negation of the boatman ever having existed at all. This rendered nonsensical the fact that the boatman was the narrator's father and lead many a candidate to draw inaccurate inferences about the impact of the final line. Where candidates were still able to connect this 'mystery' with the rest of the passage, the mistake did not necessarily diminish candidates' achievement.

There were some perceptive comments about the final two, single phrase paragraphs which were frequently described as the final 'twist in the tale'.



# LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

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Paper 0486/42  
Unseen 42

## Key messages

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- Stronger responses achieve a balance between all the Assessment Objectives: knowledge, understanding, comment on language and personal response; comment on language needs to be linked to effect on the reader and overall interpretation
- In this series, some responses were too short to show developed understanding
- Both poetry and prose responses would improve with greater focus on form and structure, rather than content.

## General comments

The standard of average responses in this series for this paper continues to improve, and there is plenty of evidence that candidates are well-prepared, interpret texts in ways which go beyond surface meaning, understand a range of ways in which writers achieve their effects, and are thus able to communicate their appreciation of texts in a variety of forms. There were few responses which did not show at least basic knowledge of the surface meaning of the texts, and most communicated some original and individual argument. There were some responses, especially to prose questions, which struggled to communicate much more than a broad narrative paraphrase, but most addressed the writing itself, and its impact on the reader through deliberate authorial effect. The strongest responses were highly impressive: they showed careful selection and interpretation of detail, clear critical engagement with imagery and language thus achieving an appreciation of how the texts worked, with a focused response to the question.

Attention to the question is essential for a successful response. The question is carefully designed to address how the writing works, and makes a text memorable or vivid for the reader. Good responses therefore consider the connection between the style and structure of the writing and the emotive effect on the reader, and do not merely recount the content of a text. In this series, prose passages proved a more popular choice than in some previous years, but it is especially important when writing about prose to address form, language and structural choices by the writer, and not just the narrative and characters. Misunderstandings about meaning should be avoided by careful reading of the rubric which precedes the question. If there are characters whose names and identities need to be explained, that explanation will be in the rubric. The rubric, or the bullet points which follow the stem question, will explain the gender and relationships of poet, writer, narrator and characters. We also aim to explain any vocabulary which is unusual or used in an idiomatic way, or any textual references which depend on their cultural context. This is in order that candidates can focus on the writing itself in their responses, and not be distracted by aspects of cultural or social context which are extrinsic to the passage itself. We are also careful to include texts from a very wide range of cultural contexts: in this series African-American, Scottish, 1930s and 1980s English texts, Indian and recent British fiction featured, with a good balance of writing by men and women representing the diversity of Literature in English. We will also include pre-twentieth century texts and literary non-fiction from time to time.

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### **Comments on specific questions**

#### **Question 1**

*Moon*, by the Scottish poet Kathleen Jamie, first appeared in her volume *The Overhaul* in 2012. Candidates who enjoyed its elusive qualities wrote well about this poem. Those looking for a more straightforward narrative tended to choose the prose. The sound effects and imagery of this poem are subtle rather than obvious, and the structure of the poem depended on sensitivity to the effects of half-rhyme and enjambment, and to the effect of syntax. The images of the poem needed some consideration, as did the characteristics of the moon and the way the poet addresses her. We follow the convention of referring to the voice or the speaker in the poem as 'the poet', but candidates should appreciate that poems are not necessarily autobiographical confessions, but could also be lyrical evocations of mood. Candidates should be aware of the convention that italics in poetry usually represent direct speech. The poet not only voices her unsettled feelings about the voiceless moon, but also addresses it directly about the words it refuses to say.

Many candidates took the approach that the poem could not simply be describing the play of moonlight and decided from the very beginning that the moon was the poet's mother and described their relationship. This approach could provide some explanation of the poet's frustration with the moon's cool and wordless attention, but had limitations, especially as the penultimate line of the poem is '*You are not my mother*'. Words such as 'may' and 'might' are useful in interpretation of poetic texts, and an initial overview of the poem was more successful if it explored how the moon was characterised instead of immediately giving it a specific human identity. Candidates sometimes approach poems as if they are simply riddles with a solution. The wording of the question suggests that the moon has an importance to the poet which is striking and therefore unusual, and the first bullet point suggests that looking at the way moonlight is described would be a good start. Seeing the poem as a puzzle or a decoding exercise can get in the way of sensitive attention to

how the writing works. More confident responses usually focused on the word 'slipped', and what it suggests about the tricky or evasive way with which the moonlight appeared to enter the room. Many worked successfully around the implicit contrast between light and darkness, which becomes explicit in the reference to 'a small valise of darkness' in the second stanza. Few picked up the humour of the characterisation of the moon as a casual traveller, but many linked the imagery to the idea that the moon had come to 'commiserate'. They therefore read the poem as an elegy, and the poet as still in mourning and therefore longing for 'an oblong of light'. Some thought the mother had been a traveller or would slip into the attic room in a similarly curious or consoling way. These were plausible readings.

Others picked up the poem's references to time as well as the movement of the moon and rightly saw these as an aspect of the poem's structure, as the antepenultimate word is 'waiting'. Some linked this to the idea that the poet is grieving, or waiting for some kind of message about love or life after death – indeed there were quite a few who read the poem as a kind of Gothic ghost story with the moon haunting a place with which it was once familiar. However, it is also important at this point to invoke the notion of tone in poetry. An interrogative reading of the poem has to 'hear' it, as well as read it, and pick up the tone with which it is expressed as well as the kind of mood which is evoked. This music of poetry can be achieved through sound effects, but also through sentences and sentence structures. Here, for example, the longer sentences imply the continuous movement of moonlight around the room. Objects are 'stirred' into 'unexpected life' by the moon's 'pretended' interest. Even the books 'appeared inclined to open and confess'. In contrast, the poet says simply that she 'waited', her own gaze almost as 'cool' as that she attributes to the mood. The short phrase suggests that it contrasts with the meandering movement of the moon.

Why does the poet decide she has had enough? A number of candidates asked questions of this poem, which was a fair approach as it does not yield easy answers, just as the moon itself does not seem to communicate a message to the poet. An accomplished personal response or interpretation tries to answer such questions using evidence from the text, but is aware that there may not be a definitive answer. The poet thinks the moon 'harbored some intention' or is trying to communicate. Is this connected with her own grieving, or frustration? Good candidates noticed that she describes both as 'scarred', although few noticed that this could be a reference to the surface of the moon and perhaps the way it has lost its former mythical magic. Too many read the word as 'scared', and thus saw the poet (often called 'the girl') as a rather weaker figure than the poem's defiant tone suggests. Is it significant that the poet loses patience with the moon's inability to communicate with her when it lights up the 'flower sketch' and then stretches out to make itself at home on the 'pinewood floor'? Some linked these images to the poet's own childhood or sense of home. Certainly the poet decides the time has come to address the moon directly, although there is no reply.

Those candidates who linked the moon very directly to the poet's relationship with her mother read the one-sided dialogue in the final stanzas in varying ways. Some felt that the poet's mother would have offered 'the simple words of love' which the moon cannot, reading the poem as an elegy in which the poet also mourns nature's inability to commiserate with human feelings, for all its contact with the various inanimate objects in the room. This was an intelligent and certainly valid way to interpret the poem. Much depends on the tone of the final two lines. Those candidates who felt that the mother was never capable of saying 'the simple words of love' either were perhaps closer to the overall mood of the text. Some felt that the mother may have possessed the characteristics attributed to the moon, such as coldness, pale light and an awkward curiosity in the circumstances of the poet's independent life, in her book-lined attic. One or two felt that the mother might have carried her own 'valise of darkness'. These responses showed thoughtful and sensitive engagement with the poem's images and choice of words. This is not a poem which can yield a 'definitive' reading, but it proved highly successful in provoking a range of strong reactions to its striking suggestions.

## Question 2

The prose extract from Graham Greene's *I Spy*, published in England in 1930 and with a World War One setting, was perhaps more superficially accessible to less confident candidates, and proved the slightly more popular choice. Good responses had to engage with the implications of descriptive language and Charlie's reflections on family relationships and the behaviour of his father, before moving on to explore the drama of his father's arrival and what might happen next.

The question concentrated on the ways in which the writing creates tension and build suspense as the passage develops, and a developed answer needed to look at the passage sequentially and show awareness of the many elements which contribute to the final, unresolved sentence. Many concentrated more on the narrative than the writing itself, and took a while to realise that the greater suspense arises from Charlie's father's ambiguous activities, not whether Charlie will be caught red-handed in the attempt to smoke a cigarette. Some were rather moralistic about Charlie's activities or rebellion against parental authority; others were more sympathetic towards the peer pressure to which he was subjected. This was less

important than a detailed response to the writing. Most picked up the ways in which the reader is curious about what is happening before we even know it, and some realised that withholding and then gradually revealing information is a key technique used by the writer.

Many noticed that Charlie 'tiptoed' and moves with 'caution' and that the front of the house is 'irregular' to create an uneasy atmosphere, before we even know what the boy's purpose is. Some wanted to use checklists of 'the Gothic' in order to interpret the sources of unease. Certainly there is a play of light and darkness, but this has more to do with the wartime setting. Not many understood that the searchlight is actually Charlie's ally and not his enemy: it allows him to make his way down the stairs and into the shop without needing any light. Many thought the searchlights could find him out, when the writer makes clear that they are 'seeking enemy airships', and not looking in his direction. Greene's writing is very precise, but some candidates nevertheless made factual mistakes of comprehension such as thinking a light is on in his mother's room or that Charlie needs to go outside to get to the shop. While it was understandable that the details of the World War One setting, and Charlie's apparently very English family context might have eluded candidates, close attention to language and grammar should have avoided factual error. A more successful approach was to focus on ways in which the writer invokes the elements, and all the senses ('all the windows were dark', 'the wind', 'his mother's snores', 'the beating of the waves') to create the effect that everything is hostile to Charlie, and that a war-time setting contributed to his, and the reader's, unease about what might happen next. The use of short sentences such as 'Charlie was frightened' contributes to tension by creating an awkward staccato effect.

Most candidates spent a large portion of their answer on the short but very atmospheric opening paragraph, but it was important to see beyond this to appreciate the sources of suspense and unease. The second paragraph makes clear that these are two-fold: Charlie is 'mocked' at school in ways which he will later echo himself ('Cowardy, cowardy custard') and significantly has only a distant relationship with his father. Some candidates found it baffling that a twelve-year-old boy should be closer to his mother than his father. However, the text makes this relationship easier to understand: there is no 'demonstrative love' only 'a wraith, pale, thin, and indefinite'. Some misread this description and thought that 'left even punishment to his mother' meant that the father was abusive, violent or a ghost. The key word is actually 'indefinite': Charlie makes it clear that he never felt he knew his father, he was often absent – either physically or metaphorically – and you could never trust what he said about his whereabouts. Those who paid attention to the question could better explore the implications of the writing, and appreciate the suspense created as Charlie is not certain that his father is really 'in Norwich'. Lack of trust and fear of betrayal subtly contribute to the atmosphere developed by the writer, which is highlighted by the description of taking the cigarette as a 'crime'.

There were many candidates who wrote effectively about ways in which suspense is ratcheted up in the dramatic paragraphs which follow, and the use of Charlie's frightened and hypersensitive narrative perspective in order to highlight every noise and action. He seems over-sensitive to time ('quite suddenly...half a minute' and each movement of the searchlight) and to noise ('the footsteps of a policeman', 'a hand tried the door', 'footfalls in the street'). Some candidates focused on Charlie's heightened emotional state, as he wavers between moments of courage and cowardly despair, and almost sinks back as if submitting to the bullying of others. Some pointed out that he was not very well-prepared for his mission as he did not have matches. Those who focused more on the writing noticed how appropriate it is that 'grown-up and childish exhortations [are] oddly mixed', as Charlie is trying to prove himself an adult but is deeply uncomfortable outside the childish world of his mother's 'boisterous presence and noisy charity'.

Charlie's discomfort is redoubled by the sounds outside: while the footsteps and torchlight of the solitary policeman were alarming enough, the 'sound of several men' increases suspense further, as Charlie 'was old enough to feel surprise that anybody was about'. The frequent references to Charlie's age are a deliberate effect of the writing: he is at a turning point in his relationship with his family. Careful reading of the dialogue was essential. Charlie's father is with strangers and even when he recognises his father's voice it has an 'unfamiliar' note and is 'undecided'. Some rightly asked why the father wants to hide the presence of these strangers from his family, and realised that he is up to something illegal himself. A few saw something sinister in the officials with 'bowler hats and belted mackintoshes' who accompany him. Tension is certainly sustained by the simple sentence 'they were strangers'. High achieving responses again noticed Charlie's acute reactions to every sound, especially as he is hiding where he can not be seen and can not see much. Language reveals how he perceived the violent flash of the torch and burst of the light bulb. Some commented on how sound and sight combine through alliteration when 'electric globe burst into blue light'. Some noticed the hyperbole of 'he wondered whether his father would hear his heart beating', and felt that Charlie is now so frightened that he believes the impossible. One or two linked this violent heartbeat with the 'beating of the waves' in the first paragraph, to point out the physical nature of Charlie's fears, both real and imaginary. Some linked his anxious prayer and nervous clutching of his nightshirt to the way he 'clenched his

fingers' earlier, when the creak of the stairs reminded him that he 'had no sense of safety' precisely because his father was so 'indefinite' in both his emotions and movements. By this point, more confident candidates were alert to the inconsistencies of the father's behaviour as well as the reader's suspense at his possible reaction if Charlie is caught. They suspected that the father may himself have betrayed his family in some way. A few noticed that when the father stands with 'one hand held to his high stiff collar' he is making the same anxious gesture which his son had made twice before,

There were plenty of confident responses to the implications of the writing in this passage and some very accomplished ones. The most successful realised that similar analytical tools can be used on prose passages to those used for poetry: description is often symbolic, sensuous language is heightened in both, and the narrative voice needs to be treated with caution. Those who appreciated how Charlie's character is conveyed through his viewpoint were especially successful, as were those who paid careful attention to sentence construction and its role in developing both suspense and the structure of the writing.



# LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

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Paper 0486/43  
Unseen 43

## Key messages

- Careful reading of the rubric, question and bullet points should help to avoid misunderstandings
- Opening paragraphs should express an overview of the whole text, and not simply repeat the words of the rubric and question or list rhetorical devices
- Stronger responses achieve a balance between all the Assessment Objectives: knowledge, understanding, comment on language and personal response; comment on language needs to be linked to effect on the reader and overall interpretation
- In this series, some responses were too short to show developed understanding
- Both poetry and prose responses would improve with greater focus on form and structure, rather than content.

## General comments

The standard of average responses in this series for this paper continues to improve, and there is plenty of evidence that candidates are well-prepared, interpret texts in ways which go beyond surface meaning, understand a range of ways in which writers achieve their effects, and are thus able to communicate their appreciation of texts in a variety of forms. There were few responses which did not show at least basic knowledge of the surface meaning of the texts, and most communicated some original and individual argument. There were some responses, especially to prose questions, which struggled to communicate much more than a broad narrative paraphrase, but most addressed the writing itself, and its impact on the reader through deliberate authorial effect. The strongest responses were highly impressive: they showed careful selection and interpretation of detail, clear critical engagement with imagery and language thus achieving an appreciation of how the texts worked, with a focused response to the question.

Attention to the question is essential for a successful response. The question is carefully designed to address how the writing works, and makes a text memorable or vivid for the reader. Good responses therefore consider the connection between the style and structure of the writing and the emotive effect on the reader, and do not merely recount the content of a text. In this series, prose passages proved a more popular choice than in some previous years, but it is especially important when writing about prose to address form, language and structural choices by the writer, and not just the narrative and characters. Misunderstandings about meaning should be avoided by careful reading of the rubric which precedes the question. If there are characters whose names and identities need to be explained, that explanation will be in the rubric. The rubric, or the bullet points which follow the stem question, will explain the gender and relationships of poet, writer, narrator and characters. We also aim to explain any vocabulary which is unusual or used in an idiomatic way, or any textual references which depend on their cultural context. This is in order that candidates can focus on the writing itself in their responses, and not be distracted by aspects of cultural or social context which are extrinsic to the passage itself. We are also careful to include texts from a very wide range of cultural contexts: in this series African-American, Scottish, 1930s and 1980s English texts, Indian and recent British fiction featured, with a good balance of writing by men and women representing the diversity of Literature in English. We will also include pre-twentieth century texts and literary non-fiction from time to time.

The stem question is in bold and allows the candidate to address all the Assessment Objectives, which are equally weighted. Good answers need to balance surface knowledge of what a text is about with deeper understanding of its implications and mood. Knowledge about the language and techniques used by writers



needs to be balanced against an appreciation of how they contribute towards the power of the text's impact on an independent reader. Therefore an introduction which simply lists all the rhetorical devices which are (or are not) present in the passage does not answer the question. Nor does an introduction which simply copies out the words of the question, rubric and bullet points with only minimal input from the candidate provide an examiner with much to reward. Essays will improve if candidates are encouraged to write introductions which convey an overall grasp of the whole text, both what it is about and its effect on the reader.

It is easier to get a grasp on a whole text if it is first divided into sections. Poetry divided into verses or prose divided into paragraphs can make it easier to appreciate how a passage is structured, but any passage will begin by introducing its ideas and characters, develop them in interesting ways, and reach an endpoint which is thought-provoking for the reader. Candidates might begin their responses more effectively if they are encouraged to divide their texts into sections first, and achieve some understanding of how texts develop and where they will end before writing anything. This is more likely to lead to an opening sentence which shows insight and understanding.

Most candidates find the bullet points very helpful in structuring their answers and often follow them carefully with simply a brief introduction and conclusion of their own. This is a valid approach and has led to some high achieving responses: the bullet points suggest particular aspects of language and form which candidates can focus on at first, and then hint at ways in which passages develop. The final bullet point is intended to encourage an evaluative approach, often beginning with the ending of the text. It assists a personal response to the whole text. However, it is not necessary to address the bullet points explicitly or slavishly or even to address them in the order on the paper. Candidates should not be afraid to express their own overview of the text before exploring their impressions in greater critical detail, and it might be a good idea to consider the form, genre and structure of the whole text before exploring its individual elements in sequence. Some candidates did not demonstrate overall understanding of the text until the very end of their answers, and some were uncomfortable with texts which are ambiguous in tone or meaning. At IGCSE, texts chosen will have a degree of complexity or uncertainty which candidates can explore in their own way. However, the answers to interpretative questions are in the texts themselves, and not outside them.

To practise interpretation, it is essential that candidates are introduced to a wide range of texts with suitable complexity, individuality and interest: the past papers on the Teacher Support website provide a very good teaching resource, especially when aided by these reports which always provide more detailed commentary on individual questions and what high achieving candidates found to write about them. For higher marks, it is essential to show understanding of each section of the text and how it develops, with some extended comment on language and techniques and their effects: it is difficult to do this in fewer than two sides of writing and most strong responses are three or four sides in length, with appropriate development and illustration of an argument which was clearly set out in the introductory paragraph.

## **Comments on specific questions**

### **Question 1**

'The Immigrant's Song' by Indian poet and dancer Tishani Doshi proved a successful and popular choice in this paper. It was chosen by about two-thirds of candidates and there were many very strong responses. Its length gave candidates an opportunity to make their own selection of details, while some of its ambiguities of imagery and tone allowed for a range of different interpretations, supported by quotation and analysis. The unconventional form of the poem made for less unproductive 'feature-spotting' than in past sessions, while the bullet points helped candidates to appreciate a structure which spoke of the immigrant's past, his or her present life, and hopes and fears for the future. The title pointed out that the immigrant has several stories to tell, some of which he claims he would prefer to withhold. Less successful responses tried too hard to supply a narrative which would fill the gaps (the immigrant is a woman whose husband died, the immigrant is a former slave from Africa, the immigrant is a modern refugee from a war zone etc.) instead of allowing the words of the poem to speak for themselves. The poem gains its power from its universality. Some responses were too formulaic, repeating the question and listing techniques instead of exploring their impact and implications, and some were too close to paraphrase. Most, however, engaged in interesting ways with the images and with the voice of the Immigrant as expressed in the poetry.

Most noted the repeated anaphora 'let us not', and the more confident responses took this rhetorical strategy as a prompt to explore why the Immigrant wants to withhold memories while simultaneously articulating them in teasing and provocative ways. Why had 'coffee beans filled the morning/with hope...'? Candidates who contrasted this agrarian innocence with the more urban world of 'gates and bridges and stores' began more successfully than those who simply thought the immigrant liked to smell the coffee in the morning. Those

who commented on the sensuous qualities of the opening lines were especially good at appreciating what thoughts of his homeland made the immigrant remember, and why the feelings of yearning and nostalgia might nevertheless be uncomfortable. Many noticed that those images quickly become more unsettling. Even the comparison of 'our mothers' headscarves' to white flags could imply some form of surrender, while the nameless birds 'that sang and died in the church's eaves' are more sinister than the cradling arms of the baobab trees. The poem pivots on the break in the line and pause before the word '*disappeared*' and the reference to men 'stolen from their beds at night'. Many wanted to give a specific definition to this horror, but its poetic power comes from its silence, and the speaker's refusal to articulate the shock of what happened.

*Disappeared* is in italics to indicate that it is a word used by others. It is clearly a euphemism and linked to 'stories / of war or abandonment' and the 'forests of the dead' which are referred to in the next section of the poem. Candidates differed about whether 'the first smell of rain', yet another sensuous memory, was an optimistic or pessimistic memory. Is it a reminder of better days, or the sadness and grief of loss and bereavement, or does it signal the transition into the present? It is a strength of the poem that different answers are possible, if supported by intelligent cross-reference to the words that precede or follow this image. Many noticed the more familiar comforts of the immigrant's present-day life - the cafés, the kitchen tables and the new brothers - noting the use of polysyndeton and alliterative patterns to convey the familiar and everyday. Candidates were alert to the idea of the past as a 'burden'. 'Let us not' becomes 'Let us' at the expense of forgetting the past: the 'fairy tales' and 'forests of the dead' appear to put the disappeared into a mythic realm where they will not disturb the daily round. After all, 'naming them will not bring them back'. Once again a single-line sentence marks a break in the poem's patterns which are usually sustained across several lines using frequent enjambment and a fluency of rhythm which means that the occasional shorter or end-stopped line ('war or abandonment' / 'we once came from') stands out and suggests that, even in the present moment, the speaker is more haunted by past memories than he would like to admit.

Such skills in reading free verse (and blank verse) might be instilled more strongly. The irregular structure of the poem may express lack of balance in the narrator's life, with its disruptions and suppressed memories. The transition from 'let us' to 'you might' signals the transition to the final stage of the text, which considers the possibilities of the future. Some picked this up and noticed that both phrases imply that the speaker is imagining an audience who might share his memories, and who directly involve us in the dilemma of how to speak about those past memories with their descendants. This certainly contributes to the poignancy of the poem, and a number of candidates made links between this contemporary poem and current conflicts, showing sympathy for the difficulties encountered by refugees and migrants.

Not all candidates found time to write enough about the final section of the poem. Indeed, many thought it was in two stanzas and therefore two sections. This limited their capacity to engage with the future life of the immigrant and his stories, as signalled by the third bullet point. There was uncertainty about why his grandchildren might speak with 'forked tongues', with some speculation about snakes, original sin and Satanic possession. More well-supported answers pointed out that the grandchildren might speak a different language and would only know part of the truth about their country of origin, because their grandparents had only told them part of the story. Confident responses focused on 'the sky and the coffee beans' and noticed that the immigrant is only passing on the happier part of his memories, as we know from the earlier part of the poem before the disappearances. The most interesting answers all had something to say about the poem's final images. If the grandparents only tell half the story, the rest is set afloat in a fragile image of a 'paper boat'. Does this suggest that the memory will be lost to the natural world? Or will it get stronger as a whisper becomes a song and then a repeated 'howl and howl'? Both pessimistic and optimistic interpretations of these final lines were possible. Stronger responses tended to note the patterns of alliteration, enjambment and repetition which make these the most lyrical lines in the whole poem. Others noticed the persistent imagery of the natural world, which the immigrant associates strongly with his or her homeland. Both approaches led to a deeper understanding of why 'the wind is the only word' is such an effective final line to the poem, as it suggests that only language of nature can express the suffering of loss.

## Question 2

The prose extract from Patrick Gale's novel *Notes from an Exhibition* (2007) portrays one of the happiest moments in this novel. Gale uses the form of an artistic commentary on Rachel's imagined works of art. Rachel's life as a creative artist takes a toll on herself and on her family, and this is hinted at when she spends her son Petroc's birthday sketching out her own artistic vision and almost forgetting that he is there. Some candidates did intuit this - and one or two were quite censorious of her parental neglect - but the main focus of the question was clearly the descriptive qualities of the writing and how it provides insight into the artistic process. This question was less popular than **Question 1** and there were some responses which did little more than paraphrase its surface narrative, but the highest achieving answers showed remarkable

understanding of the artist at work, and ways in which the writer's language conveys her way of looking at the world.

Sound responses to the prose question always consider the viewpoint from which the narrative is narrated; here, the narrative is in the third person but Rachel's perspective is clearly focalised. The second bullet point in particular suggested that candidates should attend to how the things which Rachel sees are transformed into sketches and preliminary studies for a work of art which will clearly abstract the realistic scene depicted by the novelist. The most confident appreciated this: the artist is more interested in the 'planes of water' caught within the frame of the archway than the peripheral surroundings. These become an idea about 'layers of finely gradated colour' and the comparison with 'a stack of Pyrex saucers' is deliberately incongruous and thought-provoking. The description of the artist 'seeing it yet not seeing it' and forming and rearranging images 'on the canvas in her mind' shows the process of imagining a picture, and makes it clear that this is not just a visual process. The artist's work is likely to involve this process, rather than merely mechanical reproduction of what she sees. In a similar way, critical reading of this passage needs to pay attention to the resonance of the descriptions and their emotive tone and mood, not just what is seen and what happens.

With more practice in reading examples of well-crafted prose, candidates should be better equipped to respond to them in a less literal way, and to see beyond a template of descriptive techniques. The best answers responded to what language tells us about mood. It is significant that Rachel settles herself 'comfortably' in order to take pleasure in working, and that this is the 'risky' side of the beach. She has deliberately taken risks – for Petroc too perhaps – in order to fulfil her artistic vision, as the rocks are 'barely contained' at the edge of the cliff. It's a very visual image of the ways in which artists work on the edge, and how this can sometimes endanger family relationships.

Candidates noticed that Rachel sees the shape of the archway as a 'challenge' and enjoys the difficulty of recreating it with limited equipment, later delighting in experimentation with the water-soluble crayons using a 'handkerchief dipped in apple juice'. More might have noticed her interest in 'extremes of light and shade' and how Gale points out the artist's interest in the extreme and unusual. Some were able to see this in the contrast between the 'still, dark pool' and the 'dazzling white-shot blue' but fewer moved on to explore how it is light, colour, contrast and texture which interest Rachel. Some pointed out that her dedication to her art emerged in the fact that she was fascinated by the Pyrex saucers 'in a hospital canteen' when most of us would be thinking about something else.

As the writer takes Rachel's perspective, little attention is paid to passers-by, the passing of time, or Petroc's own activities. He plays and helps himself to what was presumably meant to be his birthday picnic, and later supplies material for Rachel's artistic experiments. The old man distracts her because he is visually interesting, and plenty of candidates thought so too, often to profitable effect. The exaggerated descriptions of him ('impossibly tall') and his movements ('like a wading bird') provided a more obvious focus for attention than Rachel's more abstract preoccupation with the arch and the waters. There is also a touching moment of comic collusion with Petroc ('she grinned at him'), which might absolve her from any charge of neglect. Most candidates certainly noticed the simile which compares the old man to a Mervyn Peake illustration, and how Rachel relates what she sees to works of art. It is not just his look and actions which are both distracting and interesting, but also the way he seems 'like a speeded-up re-enactment of childhood joy'. Some more confident answers successfully linked this to Rachel's own child-like nature and concentration on her present joys, referring to the next paragraph which describes her as 'entirely absorbed and happy' while both working and playing at the same time. Many wrote about the 'quick cartoony drawing' and some noted the child-like alliteration of 'stamping in the surf'. Fewer engaged with the more abstract patterns of 'dish shapes and bending discs' with which Rachel is now preoccupied. Her interest is now in 'entirely unwatery shapes' and the play of light on water, and this blend of the elements, mirrored by her use of soluble crayon, might have received more detailed attention. Nature is abstracted and turns into light, colour, shape and texture; the human element is little more than a distraction to this artist at work.

Most candidates, however, wrote skilfully and often sensitively about the way the passage ends, with Rachel feeling 'a kind of pain' when she cannot develop and complete her vision without paint and brushes, and urgently needs to transform the preliminary sketches into canvasses. Thus an idyllic moment of happiness is contrasted with the realities of practical life. Most noticed her 'spasm of guilt' at having forgotten about Petroc's birthday and why they were at the beach in the first place 'with no one else'. Several suggested that her son is paying a price for his mother's artistic preoccupations, and some wondered whether the pain of 'her inability to take the ideas further' is greater than her belated feeling of guilt. Certainly this paragraph, taken with the previous one, show how work is important to Rachel and why it makes her happy.

Few responses to this question showed any misunderstanding of the passage. Most engaged with some of its deeper implications, and how the writer describes what Rachel sees. Fewer wrote about the different aspects of her artistic experimentation, as she plays with different sketches and ideas about the colours and textures she observes. The best appreciated the details of Gale's recreation of the workings of the artist's mind, and what was unusual about how she saw the world. They explored the strongly visual qualities of the writing and its moments of humour, and began to explore both the mood of the moment and the deeper implications of the way Rachel is possessed by her work, too absorbed to notice the time or remember other commitments. Those who chose this question clearly enjoyed the opportunity to explore the relationship between the verbal and visual arts. Just like the poem, the passage shows language straining at the limits of what can and cannot be expressed easily in words, and it was very encouraging to see the ambition with which candidates tackled such complex writing and ideas.