

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 8693/01
Passages for Comment

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General comments

Overall it was clear that candidates enjoyed the material and the variety it offered but also that candidates at the lower end of the range thought at this level it was sufficient to comment on basic punctuation, paragraphing and even spelling as valid points of comparison. There was some proficient and solid work but also a sense that some candidates were being primed with a list of features to spot without always appreciating the linguistic and stylistic effects created in the context of the material. It is worth reminding centres that candidates at this level need to be equipped with a sound command of written technical English as well as the capacity to comment on aspects of language and style. Most candidates managed their time well. There were, however, some candidates who did not number questions clearly and some scripts were not secured properly, issues perhaps one or two centres might like to address.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

- (a) This was a popular option. Many assumed Loretta was in love with herself and more perceptive answers also gauged that she was in love with life and had the optimism of youth. Effective answers also sensed the contrasts in the passage – such as the significance of her ‘bland’ prettiness in opposition to her view of herself as ‘daring and dangerous’. Many grasped the implications of ‘restless’ but not of ‘blind’ to describe her excitement. Effective answers noted the stereotypical image in the scarlet lips and coquettish curls and the image of the movie star in the description of her hair blowing in the wind. However, fewer candidates noted the veiled implications in the words ‘bland’ and ‘mindless’ in describing her eyes, nor the contrast in the ‘puffiness’ of her youth and the ‘competent shoulders’. Effective answers also pointed up the contrast at the close of the passage between her youthful dreams and the reality of her home life. A number of candidates at the lower end of the range tended to avoid offering textual references and relied on generalisations (such as ‘this helps us to visualise the setting and atmosphere more vividly’ or ‘this makes it more interesting to read’) which could, in truth, be applied to any unseen passage.
- (b) Answers in the lower range tended to offer a paraphrase of Loretta’s character and did not always show an appreciation of the diary format. Less secure answers tended to borrow from the passage and were not always clear in terms of expression and technical accuracy. More effective answers conveyed both Rita’s frustration with and sympathy for Loretta: some of the responses even showed her secret jealousy and voiced it in an acerbic style. Such answers managed to recognise Loretta’s situation and filter their answers through an older and more cynical friend’s view of life.

Question 2

- (a) There were some very pleasing responses here with some effective answers recognising the mixture of awe, respect and impending doom very well indeed. Some evocative and controlled senses of mood emerged in the best answers. They also explored the mixture of beauty and sadness but also the humour suggested in the description of the gorillas’ activities and the feeling of the timeless nature of the scene. In less effective answers the language tended to rely on cliché and the expression of ideas was at times impeded by a limited grasp of English combined with technical inaccuracies.

- (b) There was some proficient awareness in the commentaries. Many grasped the image of the gorilla but some missed the contrasting atmosphere of gentleness in the scene of the younger members of the family. Such answers also explored the contrasting mood of danger and beauty in both the scenery and the animal. Some recognised the 'sense of doom' and how it coloured the whole piece. Only a few candidates really explored the implications in the images of timelessness and the edenic qualities of the scene itself. There were many solid answers that compared the recreative piece carefully and purposefully to the original extract. Less secure answers tended to go overboard about the scenery and the narrator's personal adventures in reaching his or her destination at the expense of describing the mood surrounding the animal itself and the narrator's role in the relationship.

Question 3

- (a) Initially, some candidates may have considered this a rather daunting passage but, in fact, many produced very effective and pleasing answers. Such candidates quickly realised the ways in which the style was working and facilitated some mature and quite sophisticated responses, supported by a keen awareness of the structure of the original piece. Slightly less effective answers seemed to become too concerned with the mystery element at the end of the passage and latched on to this at the expense of the rest of the style. Other less secure answers also drifted too far away in the continuation by placing the family in a car or even transporting them to a shopping expedition: in other answers father even arrived in person.
- (b) Effective analyses here commented incisively on the child's viewpoint in the original passage and how this helped to shape form, language and style. They commented, too, on the structure and stylistic elements such as the use of lists, conjunctions and extended sentences as well as the pace of the passage. Such answers also explored the choice of particular words and phrases – quoting incisively – and noted effects such as the rhythm of the train and the swift changes in subject. They tried to focus on how in their own writing they had tried to capture the narrative of the third person through the eyes of the first person. More mundane responses took the author to task for her poor expression and punctuation and offered suggestions on how they could be improved.

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Composition

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General comments

A lot of candidates showed energy and thoughtfulness in their answers. Many of them seemed to enjoy writing and communicated well. There were, as usual, some very sensitive, imaginative and powerful individual pieces. Unfortunately there were some candidates who clearly struggled to express themselves in clear English, and this will seriously affect marks awarded in an English Language paper at this level. Centres are advised to consider whether candidates have the command of English necessary before entering them for this examination.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

This proved to be a popular choice and produced some effective responses. Most focused on creating a sense of mood and place and many students had been well prepared for the nature of this kind of question. Some candidates tended to focus a little too much on narrative and excessive use of dialogue, creating, in some instances, a degree of banality. Less effective answers also missed the opportunity to develop the persona of the immigrant and focused purely on the idea of the figure involved being a tourist or a stranger passing through some town or city.

Question 2

There were not many responses to this question. However, those who did recognise the nature of an interior monologue managed to offer an appropriate sense of form. There was an excellent response in which an apparently gentle and responsible man proved to be a secret murderer by compulsion. Less effective answers tended to misunderstand the form required and ended up using script dialogues or two different characters. When planned with care, this kind of option can allow candidates to show their strengths. Perhaps some centres could include in lesson plans some work on the nature and form conveyed by the term 'interior monologue'.

Question 3

When candidates grasped the idea of 'slow motion', they produced some very effective and imaginative responses. However, some candidates took the term to mean events simply being late or delayed and found themselves writing stories about being late or missing travel connections. At this level, candidates need to choose options that play to their strengths and which allow them to sustain their material. Some answers started rather well but, through lack of careful planning, did not always maintain their initial promise.

Question 4

This also proved to be a popular choice and encouraged quite a pleasing degree of self-reflection. Many candidates did play to their strengths here and drew on practice of previous questions to offer focus and structure to their responses. Sounds ranged from the noise of a bell to the memories evoked by the sea. Some candidates wove in a degree of nostalgia without overwriting the material [sometimes candidates penalise their responses by wishing to show off their vocabulary at the expense of making appropriate choices] but where some were tempted into sentimentality the essays descended into unstructured outpouring. The need for practice and planning came into the foreground in such cases.

Section A**Question 5**

This was a popular choice and many candidates had a clear sense of purpose and employed an appropriate address and tone. There was plenty of practical and, at times, humorous advice on offer, material which displayed a playful and pleasant zest for the topic. Such effective answers were also clearly aware that this was meant to be the opening to the article and needed, therefore, to be planned carefully and attractively to create impact. Less secure answers tended to offer a more generalised approach or gave a factual background to child development from the womb.

Question 6

This question produced generally informed and perceptive answers. Effective answers balanced both parts of the title sensibly and benefited from careful planning. They also selected relevant examples having defined their understanding of the term 'fast food'. Some answers contained lively and engaging arguments but tended to be let down at times by errors in expression.

Question 7

The most effective answers here were produced by candidates who had clearly studied how to write a speech and were aware of sense of audience and purpose and could select appropriate and persuasive rhetorical devices without overdoing the effect. The passion with which candidates argued their viewpoints was often noteworthy. Some proposals may have been rather clichéd but the arguments were persuasive and rang true. Strong answers also attempted to choose three options which could be linked so that a cohesive structure could be attained. As noted on other questions the need for effective planning so that material can be sustained to an evolving conclusion comes into play in such instances.

Question 8

This provoked a wide range of approaches. Some candidates used their own positions as teenagers who have a passion for life and enjoyment, yet are weighed down by the responsibilities of study and future employment chances, as a focus for the question. They produced some thoughtful and mature responses. Some of the dilemmas were heartfelt and added to the impact of the essays. Other responses considered more philosophical issues which added depth and sophistication to the essays. Less effective answers tended to be less planned and, therefore, more repetitive and generalised in approach.