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FOREWORD

This booklet contains reports written by Examiners on the work of candidates in certain papers. **Its contents are primarily for the information of the subject teachers concerned.**

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

GCE Advanced Subsidiary Level

Paper 8693/01

Passages for Comment

General comments

There was an overall sense that candidates enjoyed the passages and the variety they offered. However, some of the work in the commentary sections was limited by recurring generalisation and the inconsistent use of linguistic terminology (for example, misunderstanding word classes such as adjectives and adverbs). It might be useful for some candidates to make notes or to highlight key words and phrases on the question paper itself. Other candidates displayed strong engagement with the material and an increasing capacity to structure an argument. More candidates attempted to comment on the effects of language and better answers worked through passages in a sequential approach looking for differences and similarities between them in order to explore how the material progressed and unfolded.

It would also be useful if some Centres could ensure certain basic procedures are followed by candidates: that questions are clearly numbered; that each sheet carries the candidate's name and that all sheets are securely fastened together. Quite a number of such basic procedures were not followed this session.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

- (a) The contrasts in the first paragraph were grasped by many: the positive images suggested by the contrast of the groups of people compared to the narrator's negative mood were commented on in particular, as was the use of the setting and the darkness. Good answers also noticed the variations in sentence length culminating in the brief one which ends the paragraph. Most picked up on the use of repetition in lines 13 to 17 and sensed how possible sympathy for the narrator was tempered as he revealed to us his manipulative and practised manner. There were some pleasing comments on his actions and the contrasts established by the final paragraph – contrasts of the interior and exterior, of light and dark – were explored well in better answers.
- (b) Some candidates failed to read the rubric of the question here and wrote from the viewpoint of the tramp rather than of the welcoming host. Better responses picked up on the appropriate diary form and wrote with a sense of spontaneity. They also revealed the inner tension in the writer as she gradually realised that her sympathetic nature had been manipulated by the actions and gestures of her guest. Less secure answers tended to simply rely on a narrative approach or summarised events in a rather detached and unemotional manner. For example, they did not note the woman's initial fears for her daughter as the unknown guest knocked on the door, nor did they engage with her conflicting sympathy for the tramp. It is worth stressing to candidates that such directed writing tasks usually require some empathetic engagement in one way or another, an understanding of the underlying emotions and moods of the passage – a reason why in part (a) it is worth working through the passage in detailed sequence.

Question 2

- (a) Whilst not so popular, this produced some interesting responses and candidates seemed to enjoy the task where they engaged with the challenge. Less successful responses suffered because they did not explore the features and style of the original in sufficient depth. They tended to offer a resumé of their chosen celebrity. Better answers grasped the clipped style, the use of positive lexis, the use of humour and the individuality of the celebrity in the original.
- (b) Less secure answers tended to compare subject matter rather than style and language. Better answers did focus on structure and the obvious factual nature of the piece. It is important to stress again the need for candidates to read the rubric of the question carefully.

Question 3

- (a) This was a popular choice and produced some very good answers. The answers at the lower end of the range again worked through the passage in a sequential manner to see how it progressed as the story unfolded. There were many effective comments on the sense of prison and the comparison between the world of the classroom and the apparent freedom and vitality offered by the natural world surrounding them. There were some pleasing comments on the changing moods – from repression to rebellion to release. The reversal in roles between the teacher and Spadge was also well detected – the adult becomes the child and vice versa – and the way in which her vindictive behaviour at the start provided a contrast to his rather gentle behaviour at the close.
- (b) There were some enjoyable responses here. Better answers sensed the ambiguity required for the second report, especially the need for the teacher to disguise her personal humiliation in the guise of praise. Those who relied on tirades and rather abusive language against Spadge did not really detect the subtlety which might be employed. Again, working through the original passage in depth might allow candidates to approach these implications with greater confidence.

Paper 8693/02

Composition

General comments

Most Centres are now preparing candidates with a very clear and close focus on the demands of this paper. However, some Centres may wish to consider whether there are more strategies they could put in place, for example, a focus on particular genres might help some candidates and a stress on the use of appropriate formats (such as the layout of a drama script) might help others avoid some of the rubric infringement which occurred on **Question 2** in this session. It may also help some candidates to plan their work before they begin writing: on some occasions, answers at the lower end of the range showed little forethought or preparation. In general, though, candidates continue to produce some thoughtful and perceptive work which is enjoyable to read.

It would also be useful if some Centres could ensure certain basic procedures are followed by candidates: that questions are clearly numbered; that each sheet carries the candidate's name and that all sheets are securely fastened together. Quite a number of such basic procedures were not followed this session. A further issue to stress to candidates is the length of composition required by the rubric: 600 to 900 words. A small minority of candidates are not doing themselves full justice by writing less than the required amount, a self-penalising process.

Candidates should also be reminded for the need for technical accuracy: the most recurrent errors seem to include confusion of past and present tenses and agreement between singular and plurals.

Comments on specific questions**Section A****Question 1**

The general concept of this type of question – contrasted description – is fairly standard and candidates, in general, approach it skilfully and thoughtfully. There were some excellent responses. Less secure answers tended to either offer a rather factual approach or, at the other extreme, rather over-poetic material bordering on the excessive use of language for effect. There was some effective use of contrasting settings and ways of life. Candidates need to ensure that each section of their composition reaches the required rubric length.

Question 2

There was some serious misreading of the question here by some candidates. The question clearly asks for a drama script, a format which is fairly well established for this paper. Instead, some preferred to offer short stories and completely missed the focus of the title. Some attempted a drama script but did not seem familiar with the conventions of the format: for example, the placing of stage directions in brackets and the use of the present tense in such stage directions. Successful answers did present some effective material with some evidence of a twist or unexpected denouement.

Question 3

Effective answers showed a strong sense of structure and grasped the purpose of the task well. They offered a pleasing blend of description combined with a sense of personal reflection and honesty. Some answers began with one particular smell or taste and widened the focus: others concentrated on one particular experience and based their response on a narrative around it.

Question 4

Less secure answers here tended to centre on boy meets girl to the point that ideas of the 'unusual' or 'eccentric' became lost. This approach also meant a slight reliance on caricature rather than on detailed characterisation. Effective answers, however, relied on the development of characterisation and context in thoughtful and perceptive ways and engineered the final meeting of the characters in unusual and entertaining formats.

Section B**Question 5**

There was evidence of informed and up-to-date preparation about contemporary media and technology, as well as some of the underlying problems and complexities concerning their rapid development – issues such as economic considerations and social implications. Where this awareness was turned to the issue of privacy, there were some highly perceptive and thoughtful responses characterised by a subtle blend of argument and examples. This was also a popular choice and demonstrated that prepared strategies can give candidates confidence and a clear sense of purpose and audience.

Question 6

Here, too, there were some sensible and proficient responses reinforced by a clear sense of format, purpose and audience. Candidates selected relevant material and argued their cases well on the whole. There was an appropriate sense of address and register; the occasional response relied on a hectoring approach but this was an answer, on the whole, that candidates seemed well prepared for.

Question 7

Most responses here were thoughtful and reflective, managing to combine a clear line of argument with personal anecdotes, personal experiences and observations on current global and social events. Candidates sometimes approached the question from a religious and philosophical angle, weighing up approaches with insight and depth. Less secure answers tended to rely on a biographical approach, holding up role models as evidence of proof of either side of the argument. This tended to create a slightly impersonal tone to the material.

Question 8

This was generally well chosen by candidates who displayed a solid and informed grasp of audiences and apt rhetorical devices. Some of these techniques were applied very persuasively; in fact, some were so successful they persuaded the reader of both sides of the argument. There was a pleasing ability to draw out and highlight contrasts between the defence and the prosecution.