

WORLD LITERATURE

Paper 0408/01
Portfolio

Key messages

- Teachers should check that the tasks they set meet the specific requirements of this syllabus (and not other syllabuses they may have taught).
- Tasks for all three categories of assignment must be worded carefully to allow candidates to fulfil the requirements of the band descriptors.
- Written assignments should include marginal annotation by the teacher which comments on strengths and weaknesses of candidate performance. In conjunction with summative comments at the end of assignments (or one the individual record card), this annotation serves to justify to other readers why a specific mark was awarded.
- It is essential that all paperwork is checked thoroughly, not least for arithmetic and transcription errors.

General comments

The observations in this general report should be read alongside the individual report to the Centre.

The Critical Essay

The strongest responses demonstrated a sustained engagement with both the detail of the chosen text and the requirements of the task set. These responses showed a clear critical understanding and offered detailed analyses of the ways in which writers achieved their effects. For candidates to be able to demonstrate these qualities in their writing, tasks must be set which require consideration of the writing. Teachers uncertain about what constitutes an effective critical essay task should look at the **Section B** essay questions in the Set Texts paper and also at the examples in the *Coursework Training Handbook*. Sometimes inadequate tasks constrained the performance of more able candidates.

Weaker responses offered one or more of the following: unsubstantiated assertions; lengthy quotations (with key words unexplored); general comments on language. In some responses, extraneous contextual information detracted from the analysis of the actual text.

Most Centres offering poetry or short story assignments followed the syllabus requirement that the essay comment on two poems or two stories. Some poetry tasks were overly complicated as they included an unnecessary hurdle of comparison, which is neither required nor rewarded at IGCSE. Even in the work of more able candidates, the mechanics of comparing and contrasting detracted from the sustaining of critical analysis.

The Empathic Response

The strongest responses offered an engagingly authentic voice for the chosen character and moment in the text, integrating an impressive range of textual detail that rooted the voice in the world of the text. These responses demonstrated a sustained appreciation of characterisation, themes and language. Teachers can find examples of good and bad empathic tasks in the *Coursework Training Handbook*.

Sometimes the use of a short story as the source text for an empathic response limited performance since the short story lacked the range of useful textual material a candidate might draw upon for an empathic task based, say, on a character in a novel. Sometimes the use of a peripheral character in a longer text provided similar problems: there was simply not enough material with which to construct a recognisable voice.

The Recorded Conversation

The strongest assessments demonstrated a command of textual detail and a sustained focus on the ways in which the writer *presents* the chosen character or theme. A teacher's use of follow-up questions can enable a candidate to explore their chosen aspect in detail. The band descriptors make it clear that for high reward there should be a focus on the way writers achieve their effects. Mere character sketches or assertions about themes cannot attract high reward.

Occasionally, teachers stuck too rigidly to a checklist of perfectly acceptable questions (of the kind found in the *Coursework Training Handbook*) but missed the opportunity to ask 'enabling' follow-up questions. There were instances, too, of candidates being allowed to speak without interruption for minutes at a time, which was not in the spirit of a recorded 'conversation'.

There are three administrative issues concerning the oral assessment which are worth reiterating:

- (i) Recordings should be stopped once seven minutes have elapsed as nothing after that can be assessed
- (ii) Centres must ensure that recordings are audible and free from distracting external noise
- (iii) The recordings of the candidates in the sample should be in an accessible format on a clean CD, and they should be clearly labelled with the candidate number and name.

The Sample

This list is a reminder of good practice:

- 1 The individual record card should be stapled (or secured by treasury tag) to the written assignments in the order they appear on the card. Plastic wallets, cardboard folders and paper clips should not be used.
- 2 Critical essays should begin with the full title of the critical essay task and empathic responses should begin with the character **and** chosen moment for the response.
- 3 Each written assignment should have both marginal and summative comments (the latter can be at the end of the assignment or on the individual record card). Clean copies of written work should **not** be submitted.
- 4 Where marks have been altered as a result of internal moderation, a concise rationale for the change should be made after the summative comment.
- 5 Copies of non-mainstream poems and stories should be sent with the folders.
- 6 Oral assessments should be clearly labelled with candidate number and name.
- 7 All paperwork should be free from arithmetic and transcription errors.
- 8 The sample should be posted to reach Cambridge by the published deadlines.

It is essential that Centres take care over the preparation and presentation of folders, which is what most Centres do. However, where there are significant problems with either the standard of marking or administration, Centres can expect to be advised to enter their candidates for another Cambridge syllabus in Literature which includes the option of 100% external assessment.

WORLD LITERATURE

Paper 0408/21
Paper 21 Unseen

Key messages

- Candidates who maintain a focus on the exact wording of the stem question (written in bold in the question paper) are more likely to achieve relevance in their answers. Those who methodically work their way through the bullet points alone without reference to the stem question tend to offer a more general appreciation of the text, forgetting about the key focus word(s) in the question itself.
- Those candidates who allow time for thinking about the text and planning their response are in a better position to give an overview of the text directed towards the question in their introductions. Those who move straight into writing are often still grappling with the text as they write, sometimes contradicting their own earlier comments in the process.
- Candidates who are able to integrate comments on language, form and structure smoothly into their discussion tend to be more successful than those who approach the text with a rehearsed, rigid plan, often characterised by the use of a mnemonic as a starting point to planning.
- There is no automatic reward for 'feature spotting'; comments about simile, metaphor, juxtaposition, etc. should be firmly followed up by an exploration of the meaning or effect achieved.
- Good quotation technique goes a long way to achieving fluency and sharp focus in answers. Those candidates who can use short quotations embedded within a sentence are more likely to achieve this than those who copy out lengthy quotations followed by 'This shows ...'. Particularly unsuccessful are quotations with the 'middle' missing, replaced by ellipsis; candidates should be willing to quote directly the words they are commenting on.

General comments

The responses offered by candidates to both poetry and prose this session proved to be largely effective and meaningful. Many candidates seemed to have been well prepared for this paper, responding to their chosen text type with an emotional as well as a critical engagement. Stronger answers were not only able to explore the content of the text and its key ideas, but also concentrated closely on how these ideas were conveyed by the writer, 'how' being, as ever, a key word in the questions. The best answers were characterised by an ability to respond to the writer at work, seeing the text as a constructed piece of art honed with the 'tools' of the writer's craft. Many displayed a high level of personal engagement with the text, relating the poem's 'message', for example, to their own experience of the world or, in some cases, to their own reading or knowledge of world affairs. All candidates, regardless of ability, made a good effort to do well on the paper and they saw the examination as an opportunity to exercise and demonstrate the critical skills they had gained during their course of study.

Fewer candidates in this session adopted a formulaic approach to their answers. These types of responses, often characterised by use of a mnemonic in the planning followed by a rigid discussion of form, structure and language in disconnected paragraphs, were less evident than has been the case in previous sessions. Those candidates who did focus on an ordered search for technicalities in the text tended to produce rather clinical responses, detached from the emotional impact of the writing. Some candidates would have benefitted from avoiding the use of technical terminology in general; simply engaging with the writing on a personal level and describing how the language achieved its effects on the reader would have proven more effective. Teachers may want to avoid 'technique spotting' exercises with candidates who tend to latch on to terminology, using it as a crutch to identify or spot the 'answer' without any real engagement with the subtle ways in which language works in shaping meaning. More successful responses tended to begin with an

overview of the task and text, moving on to work through the poem or passage in sequence; these answers were thus better able to discuss the developing effects of the writing on the reader.

Candidates should generally be encouraged to spend time thinking about the text before they write, perhaps underlining pertinent passages of text and annotating the question paper with preparatory notes. This should be seen as a worthwhile investment of time in improving their chances of success in responding to unseen texts.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

From *The Bronze Horseman*

How does the poet strikingly convey the force of the storm?

To help you answer, you might consider:

- how he describes the weather
- the words and images he uses to portray the River Neva
- the impact of the storm on the city and its people.

The poem proved accessible to all candidates who tackled this question, who engaged at varying levels with its animated account of the bursting of the banks of the River Neva and the devastating flood of the city of Petrograd. It was good to see that many candidates were able to follow the narrative movement of the poem, noting the struggle put up by the river against *both storm and sea*, its eventual surrender to these greater forces and the consequent horror inflicted on the defenceless city and its people.

Basic responses focused on the first two bullets: the description of the storm approaching and the river. Most could identify some level of personification in ‘her shapely confines’, ‘As does a sick man’, and ‘beat bitterly’. There was a general understanding that the storm overwhelmed the river against her will ‘Until she could no longer fight’. Most candidates could identify ‘cauldron’ with witches and fury, and could say that the river being compared to a ‘savage beast’ showed that it had become an unstoppable force. The third bullet was often skipped through rather cursorily, however, usually with a mention that the people lose everything as a result of the storm; even the dead are lifted out of the ground, and this is God’s judgement.

Stronger candidates were able to pick out the details in ‘the dark mists rose’ and ‘November blew and autumn froze’ as indicating that something dark and mysterious was approaching the city and was sufficient to turn autumn into an early winter. They noted the enhancement created by the enjambment in ‘And in the midnight darkness rain/Beat bitterly upon the pane’, making the lines run faster and more furiously. Most saw that the river becoming a savage beast creates a predatory force, which many likened to the river being ‘possessed’ by the sea and the force of the storm, so that a new amalgamated power is created which attacks the people. One particularly focused response noted that: “The vulgarity in the word ‘stupidity’ proves that the battle between the storm and the sea was nothing more than senseless violence that would build into a more destructive disaster.”

There was much in the second section of the poem, which dealt with the devastation of the city, for candidates to comment on. Many noted the hyperbole of ‘waters splashing mountains high’ and the alliteration of ‘foaming furiously’, but only those who went on to discuss the effects created by these techniques could reach the higher bands. At a simple level, candidates who could explain that mountains are extremely tall structures and so comparing the waves to mountains suggests that the waves were very high indeed moved a simple ‘spotting’ of technique into an analysis of how the method works. Similarly, those who could go beyond saying that ‘foaming furiously’ is ‘alliteration’ to comment on the repeated ‘f’ sound creating an aggressive, spitting effect, conveying the violence of the raging waters, moved their discussion further up the bands.

A note again about quotation here: lengthy quotations – anything more than a couple of lines – are rarely successful. They are often followed by ‘This shows ...’ with an often quite lengthy claim for what the quotation achieves in terms of meaning, but lack sharp focus on individual words or phrases. Similarly, candidates who list two or three quotations in succession and then tag on a discussion of all three in a paragraph below do not achieve the sharp focus on the language required for successful analysis. Most successful are those candidates who can integrate brief, single-word or short phrase quotations into the

general 'flow' of their discussion and immediately follow up the cited word or passage with close analysis. However, simply integrating short quotations fluently into a narrative/descriptive recounting of the poem is not enough and tends to lead to a response that reads well, but does not actually analyse.

This session, many candidates seemed particularly keen to comment on punctuation and the effects created by commas, exclamation marks and ellipses, of which there are quite a few in this poem. This can be effective in some cases, and the more successful candidates integrated their reference to, say, the exclamation mark in 'all is doomed!' into a more general comment on the whole phrase, noting the apocalyptic tone of 'doomed' and how the dread fear of the people is highlighted by the exclamation so that we can almost hear their despairing voices. Few candidates were able to do this, however, and simply stated that the exclamation 'puts emphasis' on the line, or the comma creates a caesura that makes you pause. Often much time was spent on rather empty comments like this that did not gain the candidate any reward, time that could have been much more usefully spent on analysis of a key image, for example. Like empty spotting of similes, metaphors, juxtaposition, etc., comments on punctuation that do not engage with specific meaning achieved in the particular text being discussed cannot be rewarded.

Question 2

Explore how the writing strikingly conveys Sira's thoughts and feelings at this significant moment in her life.

To help you answer, you might consider:

- The description of their arrival at her father's house
- Sira's reaction to her mother's behaviour
- How her father's words and actions make such an impact on Sira.

The extract offered much for the candidates to explore in terms of the craftsmanship of the writing and those who picked out the focus phrase 'Sira's thoughts and feelings' from the question started more effectively than those who simply made a general analysis of the passage. It is worth impressing on candidates that there is always a specific stem question, often focusing on a particular element of the text and that this should be the main focus of responses. A general analysis of the writing may demonstrate understanding of the content of the passage and of the writer's methods, but if, in this case, the discussion was not clearly focused on Sira's thoughts and feelings, it was difficult to reward material that did not answer the question.

Basic answers generally noted Sira's anxiety about going into the house without Ramiro, her fear of her mother and her trepidation as she makes her way through the building, with a little reference to the text in support. Often, the second part of the passage from the meeting with the maid to the end was then narrated rather than analysed. Some answers became somewhat distracted by speculation about what might have gone wrong in the past between Sira's parents, blaming infidelity or preoccupation with work and business for the failure of the marriage. This type of speculation, although showing some sort of personal engagement with the story, could not attract much in the way of reward as it was not firmly rooted in textual evidence and rarely focused on Sira's thoughts and feelings. Whilst a 'personal response' to the text is to be encouraged, this can take the shape of the candidate's own interpretation of the writing (How does Sira feel about Ramiro? How do we know?), rather than conjecture about the 'back story' of characters that is more akin to creative writing than literary analysis. Similarly, 'bolted on' personal response ('This reminds me of a time when I was very frightened about meeting someone...') often appears mechanical at best and can, indeed, appear insincere. Candidates should be reassured that, if they are answering the question then they are most likely offering a personal response to the text and do not need to set aside special paragraphs for this purpose.

Stronger responses were able to discuss the imagery with which the author conveys Sira's apprehension, her 'clinging to the handrail as though to a life vest' and the 'scratching the sofa upholstery as though...trying to make a hole in the warp of the fabric and escape through it'. Many identified the way in which the writer describes Sira's thoughts as they travel upstairs, with the landmarks of various floors acting like a punctuation, and the preoccupation with how strange it is that Sira's mother is wearing a suit Sira does not recognise and seems so self-assured in what ought to be a strange place to her.

Strongest candidates went into greater detail, particularly of the way in which Servanda greets them as if they are ghosts, followed by the voice of Sira's father coming out of the background as a faceless voice, as if he too is a ghost, which he has been, in Sira's life. Most noted that everything about Sira's father is large: large rooms, large man, large desk, and that his home is suggestive of wealth and power, with walls covered with hangings, tapestries and family portraits, especially as he has a maid who has obviously served him for

a very long time as she recognises Sira's mother. However, good answers also spotted that Sira was not the only nervous one and noted her observation that 'He swallowed, I swallowed', seeing the mirror imaging of the words as conveying the fact that she sensed her father shared her anxieties about the meeting.

There was too much in the passage for candidates to address every aspect of it in the given time, but those who selected a range of material from across the extract, including the ending, and who kept a sustained focus on the task, produced generally successful responses.

WORLD LITERATURE

Paper 0408/22
Paper 22 Unseen

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Comments on specific questions

Question 1

Building with Its Face Blown Off

Explore how the poet vividly conveys the destruction caused by the bomb.

To help you answer, you might consider:

- The description of the inside of the house.
- The use of comparisons in stanzas 7 – 9 (lines 19 – 27)
- The impact on you of the final four stanzas (lines 28 – 39)

This poem provoked an engaged personal response from most candidates who chose it. Its subject matter of a building ravaged by war may be a sadly familiar one to any candidate who watches news from around the world. The poem has a clear narrative and thematic movement, from a close examination of the inside of the house, through a reflection on its bombed out state using simile and metaphor, to a wider view of the scene that finally reaches a distant landscape where a ‘message’ from the poem might be constructed. Many candidates were able to follow the first few movements of the poem, and those who could make sense of the final ‘picnic’ scene did well, particularly if they noted the apparent indifference to others’ suffering that is depicted here.

Many candidates made use of the bullet points to help them frame their answers. The poem was rich in images for evaluation, and the majority of candidates gave as much attention to the middle section, the dollhouse and the play, as to the beginning. Many noted that describing the house as a dollhouse turned it into a toy and suggested that those responsible for bombing the house had treated it as a child playing with a dollhouse, rearranging everything without thought or care. The analogy with a play without characters, dialogue or audience demonstrated that the house was lifeless, had no voice and no story, and its ‘props’ had all been thrown into the street.

Quite a number of candidates did not fully address the final stanzas, or simply said that there was another place where the bombs had not yet reached where everything was still peaceful. Some saw the picnicking couple as refugees from the warzone who had somehow found a better life and that this provided hope to the reader that happiness is always around the corner if only one remains positive; this reading was less convincing than the darker, less positive one of the indifference of the wider world to others’ suffering. Stronger candidates noted the ‘crows in a tree’ symbolising death, and the ‘bridge that still stands’ where people are possibly escaping a war-torn country. Many were able to discuss the way in which the poet presents a ‘utopia’, an ‘idealised scene’, where a couple are having a picnic, ‘oblivious’ to what has happened to the house and its inhabitants’. Many gave personal responses to the sense of an accusation in this scene: that we are all guilty of being in that position of turning ‘a blind eye’ to what is happening to people across the world suffering the effects of war. Most remarked on the ‘luxury’ of the choice goods in the hamper, and some compared this to the ‘shoe among the cinder blocks’, noting the jarring effect of this comparison.

Although overall there appeared to be fewer ‘formulaic’ responses to poetry, there remained a tranche of candidates who opened their essays with a run-down of the number of stanzas, rhyme scheme or lack of it, line length, use of punctuation, etc. as a way in to the poem. This approach to an introduction was invariably unsuccessful. Candidates either did not link these technical comments to any meaning achieved in the poem at all, simply noting that these technical features existed, or they made rather exorbitant claims for the power of these technical features alone to convey every minute detail of the poem’s content and themes without any explanation as to *how* this meaning was achieved. In many cases, these introductions were extended without anything of meaning being said, followed by the ‘real’ start of the essay in the second paragraph, where many of them went on to produce rather good discussions. Candidates should, therefore, be

discouraged from opening their essays with a list of technical features and, instead, write a brief introduction that ‘echoes’ the wording of the question and makes a general response to it. A couple of sentences is usually enough to find a way in to the task and text, allowing the candidate to maximise the time available for the main thrust of the task: a detailed analysis of the poem. Comments on rhyme scheme, enjambment, caesura, etc. can then be integrated into the main body of the discussion as they are encountered in the poem and kept closely linked to the pertinent part of the text.

A final comment on coverage of the poem: the third bullet in this question directed candidates towards a consideration of the final four stanzas, where, like in many poems, earlier ideas are finally drawn together into a cohesive ‘message’. Candidates might therefore be advised to include, if they can, a discussion of a poem’s final section as this is where key overarching themes are often to be found. Candidates who did not address this final section often did not demonstrate a full grasp of what the poem was ‘about’, limiting the potential to achieve highly for ‘understanding’.

Question 2

How does the writing effectively create tension for you in this passage?

To help you answer, you might consider:

- The portrayal of David Martin’s encounter with the dogs
- The words and images used to describe the house and its interior
- How the references to sound contribute to the atmosphere.

The passage is rich in gothic/horror genre references and some more able candidates who spotted this included it in their discussion. For most, it was simply a ‘creepy’ tale, but many were able to track the movement of the tension as it was built, relieved and re-established in the narrative.

Basic responses did not realise that the focus of the question was the creation of *tension*, paying little attention to the stem question and skipping straight to the bullets as a guide to their writing. As a consequence, weaker responses were characterised by simple narration of David Martin’s encounter with the dogs, description of the house and identification of the various sounds in the extract. Many of this type of answer completed the whole essay without mentioning the word ‘tension’ at all. It may be beneficial for teachers to spend time looking at the key prompt words in questions from past papers, perhaps encouraging candidates to underline them in order to draw attention to their importance in structuring their responses. The stem question is always written in bold, a reminder that *this* is the prompt to be addressed, the bullets being only a guide as to how they might shape their answer.

Stronger responses honed in on the description of the dogs and their fangs, their stealth, the way they appear to be preying on David, and his desperation as he looks around him for something with which to defend himself. Many recognised several features of the gothic genre/horror movie – the dogs being like wolves, the house having a tower and sharp gables, the appearance of Corelli, his silent approach and his being described like ‘a spider waiting in its web’. The moonlight being personified to ‘lick’ the dragon and the fact that the dogs recoil when the lights in the house go on were also both pointed out as troupes of gothic tension.

Most candidates were able to describe the tension created by David’s entry into the house, feeling he might be lost within its passageways, listening to the odd sounds and then the silence. A few candidates saw the significance of the ‘sheet of light’ that ‘stretched out towards my feet’, reading it as a sinister invitation to David to enter the house and meet his fate. The sound of the ‘shutter banging against a window’ being likened to a heart beating was seen as reflecting the sound of David’s own heartbeat by some who related this to the steady increase in tension at this point in the narrative. Some were puzzled by the photographs and many left them out altogether, but more able candidates commented on the silver plaque with the date beneath each photo being reminiscent of a gravestone marking a death, but also noted that the faces staring out from the frames seemed somehow still living, as they ‘stared at the camera’, appearing to have been trapped in a sort of suspended animation. Some felt that David might be about to join this rogues’ gallery of Corelli’s victims. A particularly successful response noted every gothic feature that created tension, from the ‘wind among the trees’ and ‘rusty chains’ to ‘the shiver down my spine’, calling to mind Jonathan Harker’s meeting with Count Dracula, and argued that these features had been so comprehensively included as to make the extract a parody.

Those candidates who kept a sharp focus on the methods used by the writer to build tension (both in the situation/unfolding events of the narrative *and* in the crafting of the writing) and who could support their ideas with a judicious selection of textual reference achieved the higher bands generally.

WORLD LITERATURE

Paper 0408/31
Paper 31 Set Text

Key Messages

Successful responses:

- show a detailed knowledge of the text
- have a clear focus on the question set throughout
- support points by means of apt textual reference
- sustain analysis of the ways in which writers achieve their effects.

Less successful responses:

- have an insecure knowledge of the text
- lose focus on the question
- make general assertions
- describe writers' techniques rather than analyse them
- include extraneous background material.

General Comments

The strongest responses demonstrated an impressive knowledge of the text, integrating a wide range of pertinent textual reference, often in the form of concise direct quotation, to support their line of argument. Such arguments were appropriately substantiated whereas less successful responses tended to be heavily reliant on assertion and explanation. Without a detailed grasp of the way writers developed plot and presented settings, characters and themes, less confident candidates found it difficult to sustain convincing responses to questions. This was particularly evident in responses to the general essay questions in **Section B**.

The strongest responses directed their material rigorously to the specific demands of the question. Less successful responses often announced themselves by lengthy courtesy introductions: e.g. 'In this essay, I am going to...'. Candidates should be advised to address the key words of the question from the start. It was clear that some candidates spotted a key character or theme in their chosen question and wrote about it without really addressing the thrust of the question. This resulted in responses to questions about the ways in which writers *present* their characters becoming little more than character sketches, with insufficient focus on 'the writer at work'. Characters were often regarded as real-life people rather than fictional constructs, which limits the success of responses.

In many less successful responses, candidates introduced background material that had no bearing on the actual question; often, for example, there were tracts of general political context in the Sijie novel and of social context in the Ibsen play, which detracted significantly from answering the question. An enduring feature of less successful answers is a conclusion that merely re-states, often at length, the points already made and, where relevant, already credited.

The best responses demonstrated a sustained engagement with the ways in which writers achieved their effects and were particularly alert to aspects of form in prose, drama and poetry texts. Those candidates who had a detailed knowledge of their texts were also more able to probe closely and convincingly specific effects of writers' use of language and structure. This ability to evaluate texts critically is a discriminator in this paper.

Less successful responses commented on language but without perceiving its significance, for example, attempting to explore the resonances of words without linking them to content. This was an approach particularly evident in the **Section A** extract-based questions where a tendency to spot or label devices limited performance. Examiners noted an increase in unproductive and generic comments about writers' use of punctuation: e.g. 'The writer uses a lot of punctuation'; 'The short sentences are snappy / choppy'; 'The ellipses show tension'. In Poetry answers, responses often identified an ABAB rhyme scheme or lack of a rhyme scheme with limited, if any, attempt to relate such comments to specific aspects of meaning. 'Lexical items' and 'semantic fields' featured in essays again this year but rarely moved beyond providing a list of words or quotations followed by a general descriptive comment on language. In the work of less confident candidates, where there was an inclination to comment in simple terms on punctuation, structure, lineation and/or versification, this was at the expense of exploring writers' ideas.

Strong individual responses were characterised by thoughtful and perceptive comments argued and supported with care. By contrast, less confident answers purported to offer a personal response by sometimes over-empathising with characters or situation (e.g. 'The reader feels the same pain / suffering / tension / mental disturbance' as the character). Some candidates asserted that characters' experiences were 'relatable' and left it at that.

The strongest responses took note of those words in questions ('memorable', 'striking', 'vivid' etc.) designed to elicit a personal response to the writing. There was evidence of a genuine engagement with the debates set up in **Section B** essay questions.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1 – *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*

There was a generally sound understanding of the situation Simon and Grusha are in and there was some response to the symbol of the ring and the way Brecht conveys the breakdown in their communication and their relationship. Occasionally a response would quote from what the Singer says to explain the couple's problems to the audience, though generally there was little exploration of the role of the Singer. Some responses spent too much time commenting on what led up to this moment and neglected an exploration of the detail of the actual extract. Although candidates empathised with the situation, there was little close analysis of how the writing makes this moment moving.

Question 2 – *My Brilliant Career*

The tendency in the few scripts seen was to discuss the extract in isolation from the rest of the text, responding to some features of language in a rather mechanical way.

Question 3 – *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*

This was a popular text, and responses generally showed a secure understanding of why it is a significant moment in the novel, but only the strongest answers were able to evaluate how the writing makes it memorable. Many candidates were keen to explain what happened in the extract and how this foreshadowed the relationship to come between the boys and the Little Chinese Seamstress, with some lengthy explanations (and digressions) of life during the time of re-education. There was some straightforward interpretation of key images ('uncut gems') and the significance of the books and the bet made by Luo.

Question 4 – *Hedda Gabler*

Responses demonstrated a generally sound knowledge and understanding of the text; however, many explained why this was an effective ending rather than specifically exploring how the writing makes it a 'powerful ending'. Some responses focused more on the events leading up to this ending, reflecting on how Hedda's relationships make it inevitable that she will take her life. The disappointment with Lovborg's death, Brack's capacity to blackmail her and the way she feels under his control and the fact that even Tesman no longer seems to have need of her were all mentioned as reasons for her suicide. Candidates spent time on the social/cultural context, often making some rather sweeping generalisations that did little to support a convincing response to either the question or the detail of the extract.

Question 5 – from *Songs of Ourselves*

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

Question 6 – from *Stories of Ourselves*

Candidates engaged directly with the old woman's thoughts and feelings, and there were some sensitive and perceptive analyses of the way these are conveyed. The tendency of some candidates to take a line by line approach as they worked through the extract led to laboured and often repetitive commentaries, each technique having the same effect (creating fear/tension/panic). Explorations of the imagery of burial and the woman's sense of coming to the end of having dignity and control over her life made for some moving, and often successful, analysis.

Section B

Question 7 – *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*

As with **Question 4** about the ending to *Hedda Gabler*, candidates showed a generally sound understanding of the events at the end of the play but some focused more on the plot/themes/relationships leading to the final scene. The resolution to the relationship between Grusha and Simon and the decision about Michael was at the forefront of most responses, with only a few exploring how the ending referred the audience back to The Prologue. Some candidates commented on how the rift in the relationship between Simon and Grusha was satisfactorily healed at the end. Many expressed satisfaction at an outcome which fitted with their sense of justice, providing valid personal response.

Question 8 – *My Brilliant Career*

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

Question 9 – *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*

The most convincing responses looked at the impact of the re-education programme itself – the hardships (physical and emotional) and the deprivation of culture, with discussion of how the boys were prepared to do so much for literature. Some commented on the irony that re-education had the opposite effect to that intended. Some candidates saw the 'impact' of the re-education programme as an invitation to write much more generally about what they found interesting in the events, relationships and/or themes of the novel since everything happens as a result of the boys being sent to the countryside to experience re-education. These responses often lacked a clear and convincing focus.

Question 10 – *Hedda Gabler*

The burning of the manuscript, Hedda's encouragement of Lovborg to commit suicide and Brack's blackmail of Hedda were popular choices of moment. However, responses often became rather narrative in approach with time spent exploring what the chosen moments foreshadowed later in the play. Few focused convincingly on how the writing made their chosen moment particularly *disturbing*.

Question 11 – from *Songs of Ourselves*

Both poems were equally popular amongst candidates who chose this option. Candidates often showed an ability to explore the descriptions of the wealthy and how the speakers feel about them. Some candidates clearly felt sympathy for the imprisoned children who might have money but not freedom or the ability to experience the world around them. Analysis of the techniques used was generally straightforward rather than critical, limiting the potential to achieve the higher bands.

Question 12 – from *Stories of Ourselves*

Candidates appeared to find it difficult to move beyond the basic idea that a beard growing competition is, in itself, somewhat ridiculous, a point that they tended to labour in their answers. They made some reference to the extremes that characters went to in pursuit of a beard and mentioned rivalry and the climax where they were all defeated by Ralph. Many, however, were unable to go beyond a narrative and rather repetitive response. Analysis of the writer's intentions and craft were needed to achieve highly.

WORLD LITERATURE

Paper 0408/32
Paper 32 Set Text

Key Messages

Successful responses:

- show a detailed knowledge of the text
- have a clear focus on the question set throughout
- support points by means of apt textual reference
- sustain analysis of the ways in which writers achieve their effects.

Less successful responses:

- have an insecure knowledge of the text
- lose focus on the question
- make general assertions
- describe writers' techniques rather than analyse them
- include extraneous background material.

General Comments

The strongest responses demonstrated an impressive knowledge of the text, integrating a wide range of pertinent textual reference, often in the form of concise direct quotation, to support their line of argument. Such arguments were appropriately substantiated whereas less successful responses tended to be heavily reliant on assertion and explanation. Without a detailed grasp of the way writers developed plot and presented settings, characters and themes, less confident candidates found it difficult to sustain convincing responses to questions. This was particularly evident in responses to the general essay questions in **Section B**.

The strongest responses directed their material rigorously to the specific demands of the question. Less successful responses often announced themselves by lengthy courtesy introductions: e.g. 'In this essay, I am going to...'. Candidates should be advised to address the key words of the question from the start. It was clear that some candidates spotted a key character or theme in their chosen question and wrote about it without really addressing the thrust of the question. This resulted in responses to questions about the ways in which writers *present* their characters becoming little more than character sketches, with insufficient focus on 'the writer at work'. Characters were often regarded as real-life people rather than fictional constructs, which limits the success of responses.

In many less successful responses, candidates introduced background material that had no bearing on the actual question; often, for example, there were tracts of general political context in the Sijie novel and of social context in the Ibsen play, which detracted significantly from answering the question. An enduring feature of less successful answers is a conclusion that merely re-states, often at length, the points already made and, where relevant, already credited.

The best responses demonstrated a sustained engagement with the ways in which writers achieved their effects and were particularly alert to aspects of form in prose, drama and poetry texts. Those candidates who had a detailed knowledge of their texts were also more able to probe closely and convincingly specific effects of writers' use of language and structure. This ability to evaluate texts critically is a discriminator in this paper.

Less successful responses commented on language but without perceiving its significance, for example, attempting to explore the resonances of words without linking them to content. This was an approach particularly evident in the **Section A** extract-based questions where a tendency to spot or label devices limited performance. Examiners noted an increase in unproductive and generic comments about writers' use of punctuation: e.g. 'The writer uses a lot of punctuation'; 'The short sentences are snappy / choppy'; 'The ellipses show tension'. In Poetry answers, responses often identified an ABAB rhyme scheme or lack of a rhyme scheme with limited, if any, attempt to relate such comments to specific aspects of meaning. 'Lexical items' and 'semantic fields' featured in essays again this year but rarely moved beyond providing a list of words or quotations followed by a general descriptive comment on language. In the work of less confident candidates, where there was an inclination to comment in simple terms on punctuation, structure, lineation and/or versification, this was at the expense of exploring writers' ideas.

Strong individual responses were characterised by thoughtful and perceptive comments argued and supported with care. By contrast, less confident answers purported to offer a personal response by sometimes over-empathising with characters or situation (e.g. 'The reader feels the same pain / suffering / tension / mental disturbance' as the character). Some candidates asserted that characters' experiences were 'relatable' and left it at that.

The strongest responses took note of those words in questions ('memorable', 'striking', 'vivid' etc.) designed to elicit a personal response to the writing. There was evidence of a genuine engagement with the debates set up in **Section B** essay questions.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1 – *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*

Successful responses focused on the ways in which Brecht used language and dramatic techniques to create vivid impressions of the Governor's Wife, with detailed exploration of the way she behaves and the way she speaks. Most responses pointed out her concern for her finery rather than for the safety of her child. Many explored the language used to depict her arrogant and vindictive treatment of servants and the impact of the visual imagery of clothes thrown about and her various gestures of command. The strongest responses saw that this introduction to the character prepares the audience for the chalk circle test at the end of the play. Weaker responses sometimes wrote about the 'book' rather than the 'play' and 'reader' rather than 'audience'.

Question 2 – *My Brilliant Career*

Stronger responses commented in detail on Franklin's methods as well as on the striking content of Sybylla's thoughts: the imperatives about hiding one's intelligence are almost Swiftian and there is strong humour in Possum Gulley's inhabitants not knowing whether Gladstone and co. were 'islands or racehorses'. Most answers commented on her feelings about the disadvantages of being a girl, being ugly, being intelligent and being, in her own words, 'woefully out of my sphere'. Less successful responses simply worked through the extract listing features (repetition, listing, alliteration, hyperbole) whereas stronger responses explored the humorous effects of these devices in 'strikingly conveying Sybylla's thoughts and feelings'.

Question 3 – *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*

Successful responses saw the implications in each of the boy's behaviour, the significance of the setting and the glasses and could place the episode in the narrative structure and/or comment on development of character and theme. They explored Four-Eyes's fear of being thought to be a slacker by the peasants in whose hands his fate lay. Less successful responses focused in a straightforward way on description of the snow and weather; they offered assertive personal response on the cruelties of re-education for poor city boys. Language features were often described or explored in isolation without linking points to the content of the extract or the question.

Question 4 – *Hedda Gabler*

Successful responses explored the ways in which dramatic tension made this moment in the play so memorable. They paid careful attention to the dialogue spoken by Hedda and Brack and to the stage directions ('laughs', 'bantering'). There was often impressive analysis of the central metaphor of the train and the attendant sexual innuendo. Less successful responses too often missed the opportunity to write about the 'dramatist at work' but did focus more straightforwardly on what the extract reveals about the state of the Tesmans' marriage and about Brack's intentions. Some responses successfully placed the extract within the wider context of the play and looked forward to Brack's later role in events leading to Hedda's suicide.

Question 5 – from *Songs of Ourselves*

The strongest responses explored with some perception the key metaphor of Man coming out of the mountains, the speaker's attitude towards the 'sympathetic creature' and the impact of the final stanza. In these responses, developed personal interpretations were carefully substantiated. Less successful responses made general assertions about language, did not engage with the key word 'striking' and/or introduced (sometimes much) background about Smith's perceived personal misery without regard to the actual question.

Question 6 – from *Stories of Ourselves*

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

Section B

Question 7 – *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*

Most candidates understood that the Singer acted as a 'sort of chorus', a 'narrator' who made scenes, characters' innermost thoughts and feelings clear to the audience. Many could quote the Singer calling Grusha a 'thief' (thereby provoking a more honest rather than sentimental judgement). There was, however, generally little textual detail to support answers. Many were brief, narrative accounts of the scenes the Singer appears in with occasional reference to songs and explanations of scenes.

More successful responses understood how he linked the 'play within a play' with the farmers/orchards and showing how really the 'rightful owners' like the 'rightful mother' were not necessarily the best.

Question 8 – *My Brilliant Career*

There were relatively few answers to this question. These generally adopted a narrative approach, listing and describing the men in Sybylla's life with little textual reference for support. There were, however, some responses which did address the 'how far' thrust of the question, showing the difference between her father (role-model, confident, and then alcoholic, irresponsible father who let Sybylla down, warping her views of men, domesticity and possibilities of a career), the M'Swat men and Harold Beecham.

Question 9 – *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*

Nearly all found Luo admirable for a variety of reasons, but occasionally a candidate argued convincingly that from the start he was 'full of himself' and selfish and arrogant throughout, getting his come-uppance at the end when the Little Chinese Seamstress leaves him. Most, however, found Luo entirely admirable and saw only pure motives in his wanting to change the Seamstress. Less successful responses worked through his contribution to the plot with the weakest answers neglecting to link their points to the key word 'admirable'. Those who did address the question directly cited as reasons for admiring Luo his 'talent' for story-telling and his quick wit in getting him and the narrator out of trouble. Often more successful responses explored how Luo was arrogant, selfish and even worse than the Communist leaders who were trying to change what they did not like through re-education. He was, they argued, moulding her for his own needs and ignorant of her needs. His description of the Seamstress as a 'peasant' prompted some powerful arguments for not admiring Luo.

Question 10 – *Hedda Gabler*

There were some reasonably developed responses to the relationship between Hedda and Lovborg, though not many wrote convincingly about how the relationship contributed to the dramatic impact of the play. Most knew it was a past relationship where she wanted to live 'vicariously' through Lovborg. His alcoholism, her manipulative manner, vine leaves, threatening to shoot him and her fear of scandal were generally alluded to. More successful responses could see Hedda's control of Lovborg, a man who still loved her and who was ready to go against Thea in spite of all her help with the manuscript and leaving her husband for him. Some compared these two relationships, seeing the jealousy Hedda feels and her joy in encouraging him to commit suicide. The relationship was clearly seen as a catalyst for Hedda's suicide with her lying about the manuscripts, leading to him wanting to end his life and she encouraging it: then once Brack had the evidence of the pistol with which to blackmail her leaving her no choice. Occasionally extraneous and sweeping contextual points about 'women in those days' took the place of a consideration of the question's focus on the relationship and its dramatic impact.

Question 11 – from *Songs of Ourselves*

A few responses were seen. The strongest had an impressive command of a wide-ranging selection of concise quotations to support their response to the way the poets used words and images to memorable effect. These candidates had obviously taken the time and effort necessary to know their set text in detail.

Question 12 – *Stories of Ourselves*

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