

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

<p>Paper 9695/12 Drama and Poetry</p>

Key messages

- Learners should incorporate some relevant contextual points into their essays to help develop their arguments.

General comments

There were responses seen at most levels of the mark scheme, to only a few of this sessions' texts. The large majority of learners showed evidence of appropriate preparation in selecting relevant material with which to address the given tasks and often had at least a straightforward knowledge of their two texts. There were very few rubric errors in this session, but it is important that learners understand the optionality on the paper if they are to achieve the best mark possible. The quality of the expression was generally appropriate to the task, with some competent examples of essay writing seen. Some learners, on the other hand, are at times disadvantaged by a lack of structure in their essays and of clarity in their writing.

There is one specific issue to be addressed in this session:

- 1 Learners should be aware of the contexts in which the texts they are studying have been written. This enables them to express informed opinions in their essays. For example on 'morality' in Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, where the Jacobean context might have been effectively contrasted with more modern attitudes to some of the play's concerns. In passage questions on drama, the context might be other parts of the play which impact the audience's response to the characters or actions of the given passage. For example, the way in which any mentioning of Skipper in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* elicits certain responses from Brick. Poetry passage questions may be informed by knowledge of, for example, Angelou's wider poetic concerns and how the given poem extends, informs or develops the reader's understanding of Angelou's poetry. Some type of contextualisation is a syllabus requirement for all essays and when used appropriately can help learners to develop their essays in an informed and independent way.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Drama

Question 1

ERROL JOHN: *Moon on a Rainbow Shawl*

There were too few responses to this text to be able to make a general comment on performance on either of the options.

Question 2

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Measure for Measure*

This was a relatively popular choice of text with both options equally popular.

- (a) Nearly every answer to this question had a sound knowledge of the text and was able to select relevant material to address the task. Most learners structured their essays around a selection of characters, with Angelo, Isabella and the Duke the most popular choices. More successful answers developed beyond summarising what the characters did and said by exploring ‘some of the ambiguities and paradoxes’ of, for example, ‘Angelo’s hypocrisy’, as one suggested. Other competent responses contrasted the attitudes of the Duke with that of Angelo, with some learners noting that ‘the problems in Vienna come from the Duke’s previous failure to impose the law’. A few answers explored the different attitudes arising in the different social classes in Vienna – ‘Shakespeare deliberately makes Pompey’s practical views on sex more entertaining than the cold, merciless views of Angelo or even the Duke’, as one learner expressed it. Shakespeare’s choice of language was considered in some more successful answers – Angelo’s ‘use of religious references contrasting Pompey and Lucio’s vulgar innuendoes’, as one essay expressed it. Where such discussions were supported by detailed reference to the text and some awareness of relevant contexts, the answers did well.
- (b) Nearly every answer was able to place the passage generally in its context and most were aware of the essentially comic nature of the extract. Weaker answers tended to summarise the Duke’s role in the wider text; some learners were confused about the roles of Elbow and Pompey. There was too little focus on the details of the passage in weaker answers. Better answers were able to contrast the ‘lively and dramatic energy of Lucio’, with the more ‘serious and unamusing comments of the disguised Duke’, as one learner suggested. There was, at this level, some understanding of the verbal and situational comedy, with learners able to select relevant examples from the passage. However, this was not developed into a coherent argument nor was there much discussion about the significance of the comedy at this point in the play, though one learner did note that ‘the comedy of Pompey and Lucio with the Duke/Friar watching on shows the importance of restoring morals into Viennese society’. Where such arguments were supported by close reference to the passage the responses did well.

Question 3

JOHN WEBSTER: *The Duchess of Malfi*

There were too few responses to this text to be able to make a general comment on performance on either of the options.

Question 4

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

This was the most popular text from **Section B**, with two thirds of the learners choosing this text, the vast majority of whom tackled the **(b)** passage option.

- (a) Nearly all of the few learners who chose this question were able to select relevant material with which to address the question, often showing detailed and accurate knowledge of the text. Weaker answers summarised the actions and roles of Gooper and his family with little awareness of their significance to the play as whole. Better answers often saw the family as a contrast to Maggie and Brick, as a group and as individuals, with some interesting explorations of the ‘fraternal rivalry between Gooper and Brick’, which for some ‘went beyond the acquisition of Big Daddy’s wealth into deeper psychological problems, especially for Gooper’, as one argued. The use of Gooper’s children to ‘highlight Maggie’s failure as a wife’, as one learner suggested, was linked into Williams’s characterisation of Maggie by some learners, especially her use of the ‘amusing but telling phrase “no neck monsters” throughout the play’, as one essay argued. Good answers explored their significance in terms of the family tensions, the sibling rivalries and attitudes to class, wealth and, for some, Big Daddy’s illness. Where such ideas were underpinned by precise references to the text and a clear appreciation of relevant contexts, the answers did well. There was only intermittent reference to Williams’s dramatic methods, such as language and action, though stage directions were mentioned in most essays.

- (b) This was the most popular question on the paper, chosen by just over half of the entry. Nearly all of the learners knew the context for the passage, and had some awareness of its significance, especially to the audience's understanding of Brick and Maggie's relationship. Weaker answers tended to retell the story of Maggie, Brick and Skipper, often in accurate detail, though sometimes with too little focus on the given passage. Better answers were alive to the changing tone and mood, from 'Brick's sudden violence, in contrast to his previous disinterest and detachment', to 'Maggie's loss of control and determination to explain things to Brick', as some learners argued. Brick's attitudes were often well explored, with some learners wondering if he 'was jealous of Maggie's relationship with Skipper', rather than 'angry at her infidelity'. His emotional response to Maggie and 'refusal to face up to things' was also well explored in more competent answers. Other responses focused more on Maggie's characterisation and her determination to resolve her and Brick's problems, though some learners were less forgiving of her infidelity 'and with her husband's best friend too', as one noted. Skipper was discussed by some better answers, though only in relation to the two principals, with only a few learners noting his symbolic importance as 'a suicidal drunk', or 'a homosexual man destroyed by Brick and Maggie's responses to his sexuality.' Where such arguments were supported by precise references to the passage and the wider text, the answers did very well.

Section B: Poetry

Question 5

MAYA ANGELOU: *And Still I Rise*

- (a) There were too few responses to the (a) question on this text to be able to make a general comment on performance.
- (b) About one third of the entry chose this question, with weaker answers revealing only a partial knowledge of the poem and a basic understanding of its meaning. Answers at this level attempted to paraphrase the poem's meaning, often focusing on the physical effects of addiction and how they are revealed in the actions of character. Better answers did consider some of Angelou's poetic methods. Less confident responses listed some poetic techniques and identified them in the poem, with alliteration and enjambement popular choices, but with only a limited supporting commentary. Stronger answers noted some of the effects of Angelou's choices, particularly of language, in 'showing how the addict is incapable of normal actions and has become both pitiful and repulsive', according to one. Other answers considered the rhythm and the form of the poem with some understanding of their effects on the reader's view of the character. The more complex imagery however was usually ignored, 'murder is its sweet romance', for example. Only a very few answers explored Angelou's wider concerns with any confidence, limiting the development of otherwise competent essays.

Question 6

SIMON ARMITAGE: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

There were too few responses to this text to be able to make a general comment on performance on either of the options.

Question 7

WILLIAM BLAKE: Selected Poems from *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*

- (a) There were too few responses to the (a) question on this text to be able to make a general comment on performance.
- (b) There were only a handful of responses to this question. Learners generally had some understanding of the poem's meaning, though often revealed through paraphrase and summary, with some learners apparently unclear on what a 'bard' in fact is. Better answers were aware of Blake's view of poets and their role in society, with some exploring ideas such as prophecy, moral guidance and hope, though with only intermittent reference to the given poem. Other learners analysed some of the poetic techniques, such as the verse form and the language, linking Blake's choices to 'the way the Bard is made to be important in the poem', as one suggested, but

comments on poetic style were often not linked to an overall interpretation but remained separate discussion points. Blake's use of direct address to emphasise the Bard's 'preaching and sermonising role' was largely ignored, limiting the development of otherwise competent discussions. Some consideration of the title might also have helped learners to consider what Blake is using the Bard to introduce and why.

Question 8

Songs of Ourselves, Volume 2

- (a) There were too few responses to the (a) question on this text to be able to make a general comment on performance.
- (b) This was the most popular poetry question on the paper, with half of the entry responding to it. Lower-level answers tended to paraphrase the poem line by line or give a general summary with some generally relevant personal response. Such answers often showed understanding of the meaning of the poem and were less secure on its effects. Better answers considered some of Arnold's poetic techniques in conjunction with discussions on the meaning. The question-and-answer form of the opening verses was often explored, with more confident learners considering the effects. Language and imagery were popular points of analysis. Less confident responses listed some poetic methods and found examples of them in the poem with little supporting commentary. Better answers saw how Arnold's linguistic choices created the 'melancholic, almost despairing tone', as one learner commented, with others also analysing the 'disappointment and almost resentment of the speaker, as he finds getting old is not the comfortable place he thought it would be', for example. Other competent answers considered the different ways in which the speaker 'feels let down in his old age', with physical, mental and psychological concerns all identified and discussed. Answers which developed such discussions by detailed reference to the poem and close analysis of some of Arnold's poetic methods did well.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

<p>Paper 9695/22 Prose and Unseen</p>

Key messages

- Responses which rely on summary of the content of the set texts or unseen extracts are not successful.
- Successful responses focus on the writing of the texts and how the writer presents the meaning and content to the reader.
- Successful responses to **(a)** questions use analysis of specific references and quotations to support their points.
- Successful responses to **(b)** passage questions focus securely on detailed analysis of the writing of the selected extract.
- In **Section B: Unseen**, successful responses show how the text type's literary features communicate the meaning and contribute to the reader's understanding of the passage or poem.

General comments

Responses to questions on *The Inheritance of Loss* dominated **Section A: Prose**, with few answers offered on the other texts. Most candidates were able to select from their knowledge of the content of the texts, and many demonstrated competence in exploring some of the ways in which writers communicate their concerns. A number of responses did not address the key prompts in questions such as 'presentation' and 'ways in which'. These are intended to direct candidates to pay careful attention to the methods used by writers to shape their meanings for the reader. Successful candidates need some analysis of specific episodes from the texts to support their answers to **(a)** questions; focusing only on the characters and plot is not a successful approach. The passage-based **(b)** questions require very close commentary on the extract from the text provided on the question paper, which means a good grounding in prose narrative technique is needed.

For **Section B: Unseen**, candidates need a wide prior experience of the key features of poetry, prose and drama texts from different historical periods. This will allow them to respond to the text types which are presented to them on the question paper and analyse them accordingly.

Comments on specific comments

Section A: Prose

Question 1

KIRAN DESAI: *The Inheritance of Loss*

- (a)** Few candidates directly addressed the struggle for Ghorkaland independence or the activities of the GNLF in answers to this question. They form a substantial part of the plot as well as the historical context of the novel. The raids on Cho Oyu and Mon Ami, the riot in Kalimpong, the rebels' theft of Biju's belongings and Gyan's involvement in the GNLF were seldom mentioned and never explored. Candidates preferred to discuss characters' personal independence, writing, for example, about Jemu's adherence to British values, tying him to the former colonial regime and leaving him adrift in modern India. There was also discussion of Gyan and Sai's relationship and their growing independence from each other, once their love affair wanes and Gyan rejects Sai's privilege. These responses showed knowledge of the texts and contained appropriate areas for discussion. Linking these with the issue of political independence would have enabled the answers to address more fully the question's focus on the *significance* of independence in the novel.

- (b) More candidates wrote about the passage from Chapter 20. These answers showed knowledge of the relationship and often looked forwards in the novel to its descent into fighting and recrimination. Most answers gave a clear account of the passage, including quotations which anchored the accounts in the text, but missed opportunities to look closely at Desai's choices of language, imagery and structure. While some mentioned the passing of time, no candidate noted how Desai divides the passage into different sections and few commented on her use of short single-clause paragraphs. These are particularly notable in the first section, where Desai uses them to increase the sense of intimate focus on body parts in phrases such as 'the green and purple of their veins' and 'up the bones of the spine'. Confident candidates were able to discuss how the third person narration explores Sai's perspective, giving the reader a greater understanding of her than of Gyan, and revealing that, in this new discovery of emotion, she is the one who is in charge, noting that Gyan needs 'to learn how to look at a woman'. Some argued that, although there is increasing physical intimacy, the tone of the extract is one of innocence as the pair discover each other. This led in some cases to a discussion of the enumeration of body parts as if checking them off, and an accompanying lexis of measurement and accuracy, leading eventually to 'the terrified measure of his lips in hers'. There was also some capable discussion of the idea of exchange, particularly when Desai compares Sai with a saleswoman, presenting her hair 'with the zeal of a shawl merchant' and presenting her hair and ears 'like items taken from under the counter and put before a discerning customer'. A focus on the effects of details like these, and the efficient parallels of objects and kisses in the final section, marked the more confident and successful answers as they paid careful attention to the writing of the passage.

Question 2

Stories of Ourselves, Volume 2

- (a) There were no responses to this question.
- (b) There were no responses to this question.

Question 3

EVELYN WAUGH: A Handful of Dust

- (a) Nearly all the candidates who had studied Waugh's novel chose this question, though none was able fully to focus on the author's presentation of greed. The topic of the question slipped from greed to corruption or moral degeneracy in most responses, which meant that they lacked clear focus. Brenda's increasing demand for alimony was noted in some answers as the one clear example of greed, but candidates did not discuss how this demand is presented in the novel, through meetings and phone calls, including lines like Brenda's 'Tony, don't make me feel a beast'. This approach would have answered the question more clearly as well as grounding the response more directly in the text. Some answers broadened the discussion to consider sexual greed, or greed for status, which were appropriate directions to take when made an explicit direction for argument. It was less successful when incorporated into a summary of important parts of the novel.
- (b) There were too few responses to this question to make a general comment appropriate.

Question 4

COLSON WHITEHEAD: The Underground Railroad

- (a) There were no responses to this question.
- (b) There were too few responses to this question to make a general comment appropriate.

Section B: Unseen

Question 5 – Prose

The wealth of detail in this passage gave the candidates who attempted it plenty of material to work with. Answers often showed a good deal of appreciation for the work done by the dockworkers as well as for the ways that the writer conveys the hubbub of varied activities. Many observed the ways in which the writer makes clear the physicality of the work, with the 'great green claws of fruit as heavy as stone' at the opening,

where the adjectives and the simile emphasise the punishing weight which Silvano 'did not have the legs to bear'. There were also comments on the listing of various goods in the second paragraph ll.15–16, as well as the extent of the docks which 'stretched for miles' and the all-inclusive activity 'everywhere'. Several candidates wrote well about the auditory qualities of the fourth paragraph, with the onomatopoeia and present participle verbs of noise, all contained in one long six-and-a-half-line sentence to convey the inescapable continuousness of sounds. The song of the workers in the middle of the passage also drew some interesting discussion. Added to the various figures of payment through the passage, candidates noted how few the demands, how little the pay and how gruelling the work is for the dockers. Candidates often found the 'swaggering screwmen' of the final paragraph worthy of discussion, recognising their 'half-smoked cigars' as an indicator of their comparative wealth, earning 'six dollars a day' compared with the 'dollar and a half' the other workers gain. The writer also indicates their sense of superiority with their reputation as 'the kings of the docks', though few candidates looked closely enough at the paragraph to recognise why they receive an elevated wage. The last lines indicate their working conditions, in 'impossibly cramped spaces', and their skill as they stack bales 'high and tight' with their tools, leaving the cargo 'perfectly balanced, the ship unsinkable.' Even with this omission, most candidates found a number of things to say about the effects of the writer's choices in this evocative description of quayside labour.

Question 6 – Poetry

Although an approximately equal number of candidates chose to write about the extract from a longer poem, they tended to be less successful than those who tackled the prose passage, as they struggled to understand the tone of the writing. The poem depicts disruptive summer storms in an absurdist, playful way, where the 'lightning' is personally responsible for the electrical disruptions which have the effect of 'erasing voicemail and modifying personal messages'. Even more surreal are the 'miniature thunderstorms' kept 'in cages as pets', which are harnessed by children to be effective at 'recharging batteries and even vacuuming.' The poem also includes comic details such as the 'tiny tornadoes that coiled/up one's armpit hair quite painfully'. Candidates' answers took the poem very seriously and sometimes read it quite literally, while there was also some misreading. For example, some thought the children were learning 'their own names' and could 'thunder on cue' in stanza five. On the other hand, a number of responses did note the shift to colourful and beautiful imagery in the final two stanzas and some candidates appreciated the depiction of the merging at the horizon in 'pink and/ violet lightning sewing earth to sky'. Most noted that the poem is written in free verse, though few commented that the first five stanzas work almost as prose paragraphs, each focusing on a different aspect of the storms. A number of responses noted, however, that the final stanzas, as well as linguistically different, are also the only ones to be grammatically linked, accentuating the shift in mood at the end of the poem.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

<p>Paper 9695/32 Shakespeare and Drama</p>
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Key messages

- While introductory paragraphs are useful in establishing a thesis or candidates' working knowledge of the texts and/or the specified extracts, biographical and other preambles should be avoided.
- Responses should consider alternative interpretations of texts, ideally in ways that do more than merely complement their own arguments, enabling them to develop their own points further.
- A strategic approach to answering questions should be encouraged, to dissuade candidates from writing in narrative rather than analytical styles.

General comments

Consistent with a small cohort, responses did not cover the full range of available set texts, and the majority of centres chose a combination of *Hamlet* for **Section A: Shakespeare** and Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey Into Night* for **Section B: Drama**. Candidates demonstrated evidence of appreciative readings and clear working knowledge of their two chosen texts and no rubric infringements were recorded. There were few responses that were ultimately awarded a mark in the lower levels, and consequently very few examples of narrative answers or even those which favoured an obviously mechanical approach. The majority of responses engaged maturely with the texts via the questions and did so in an analytical fashion as informed by the requirements of the assessment objectives. Most were composed in clear and sustained English, written in an (at least) semi-formal register which conveyed ideas with clarity and often precision. Some candidates did tend to write in a rather figurative style. Perhaps the most common misstep in terms of composition was the inclusion of one or even two introductory paragraphs which were very general and focused on either the biography of the playwright or a general or qualitative appreciation of the perceived merit of their work. Reliance on background information, rather than context, gives a sense of the candidate hesitating before addressing the question directly. Elsewhere, contextual material was in general selected judiciously and, at least to a degree, integrated successfully into the essays. This was often done particularly well with *Hamlet*, where candidates often showed understanding of how Renaissance thought impacts the text, and with Lynn Nottage's *Sweat*, where there were some perceptive remarks pertaining to the effects of post-industrialisation on 'blue-collar' American life.

Assessment Objective 5 Evaluation of Opinion requires candidates to consider other people's ideas about their chosen texts. Most candidates included some evaluation of opinion in their responses, and the majority were able to integrate those ideas with their own, with varying degrees of sophistication. While markers recognise that it is not always possible to see a live production or video of specified texts in **Section B**, it is very useful for candidates to see at least one version of the Shakespeare play they are studying. Even a film counts as another interpretation that candidates can engage with in their answers.

For **(a)** questions there was an increase in the number of candidates who took a strategic approach to their answers. Indeed, much planning was visible (and appropriately scored out) on scripts. This no doubt contributed to the overall quality and enabled candidates to select really suitable material to use in their answers, whether they were dealing with a specified theme (such as revenge in *Hamlet* – **Question 1(a)**) or a dramatic feature (as per the single day setting of *Long Day's Journey Into Night* – **Question 4(a)**). This approach also allowed candidates to show genuine scope in their answers, both in terms of avoiding becoming too preoccupied with the presentation of a given theme through only one central character and by being able to separate the most relevant features of the text from the plot in general. Where the strategic approach is not adopted, candidates should still be advised to spend several minutes thinking closely about their answers so as to avoid the tendency for essays to merely turn into a list of points with material pertaining to contexts, the analysis of form, structure and language, and the interpretations of others, appended where possible.

For (b) questions candidates were generally successful in striking a balance between the need to give a central place in their answers to the analysis of the specified extract and the exploration, through that passage, of the overall texts. Where candidates did not achieve this, it was as a result of a tendency to slip into narrative: a linear approach to the extract is often successful (provided it is not executed literally on a line-by-line basis) but candidates should avoid the temptation for their essays to deviate into a retelling of the whole plot of a given play. The most effective responses can deal with the extract in phases, focus on the most relevant detail at each point, move out into the wider play and then return to the extract for the next really relevant feature.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Shakespeare

Question 1

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Hamlet*

- (a) Undoubtedly, respondents to this question understood what they were being asked to do, either to a greater or lesser extent. Those who were most successful usually used the character of Hamlet himself and his desire for 'revenge' as their starting point and were able to explore his motivation, mental processes and his ultimate decision to act. Moreover, the most successful candidates nearly always considered the various 'staging posts' in the eponymous hero's journey from hesitation to action, such as the conversations with his father's spirit and the suicide of Ophelia. They were equally adept at contrasting all that to the trajectories travelled by the prince's foils Laertes and Fortinbras. The very best responses also exploited the Renaissance context to the full, often considering Hamlet's moral procrastinations through that lens, or exploring how contemporary religious considerations were presented as diluting the visceral, instinctive desire for retribution. Conversely, weaker responses often restricted themselves by considering Prince Hamlet's situation solely to the exclusion of other characters or any philosophical aspects of the text. This was self-limiting by nature and narrowed such responses to the extent that it suggested a misreading of the question in the most extreme cases. Similarly, those candidates who attained the higher levels were able to employ specific and well-established critical responses (A C Bradley and Harold Bloom being favourites on this occasion), which were integrated adeptly with their own points and used to develop lines of argument. Those who attained a low Level 4 (Sound and Competent) or below were more likely to use quotations from scholars to merely furnish their essays. Finally, where candidates began with a clear and realistic thesis, perhaps one which explained what Shakespeare seemed to regard as the purpose or acceptable justification of/for 'revenge', the text was usually explored robustly. Where such a thesis was absent, the results tended to be quite narrative in approach and more pedestrian or monotone in nature.
- (b) There was a little reluctance among candidates who chose this question to address the extract from the beginning of their essays. It was not uncommon for responses to begin with a kind of preamble paragraph (which perhaps praised the play as an artistic achievement or noted its elevated place in the canon of English literature), followed by a slightly more focused introduction which began to establish links with the question and extract tentatively, before, in the third paragraph, starting to offer more direct (and therefore valuable) analysis. This approach was taken in responses who were ultimately awarded marks across the mark range. Candidates should be reminded that it is an unnecessary expenditure of time, words and intellectual energy to save the real substance for their third paragraph. However, whether so framed or not, many answers were of high quality and demonstrated, better than most other responses to other questions, an understanding of how this paper requires candidates to approach an extract-based question. Generally, knowledge and understanding of the specified passage and wider text were detailed and appropriately deployed; the analysis of form, structure and language was valid, if not confident, and supported methodically by apt references or quotations; personal opinions were informed by wider reading around the text; and the use of other interpretations helped develop rather than just echo the essays' main points. Indeed, if one criticism of the most successful responses can be given, it would be that a few candidates tried to impose too many ideas on a single response and would have benefited from being more selective in their thinking. Less high-scoring answers tended to maintain a linear approach to the extract but rarely slipped into mere narrative; instead they occasionally took on quite a mechanical approach to evaluating Shakespeare's diction and use of literary devices with many working conscientiously through each perceived phase of the extract before them.

Question 2

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *The Taming of the Shrew*

- (a) Too few responses to comment.
- (b) Too few responses to comment.

Section B: Drama

Question 3

LYNN NOTTAGE: *Sweat*

- (a) Too few responses to comment.
- (b) Virtually all candidates who attempted this question were able to address the significance of the extract's position at the very end of the play. Furthermore, most also realised and articulated the importance of what character dialogue does *not* say, or avoids, or where individual speeches seemed to be curtailed so as to avoid topics that they were perhaps unwilling to address. Most also were able to use the extract to make comparisons and contrasts with earlier scenes in the play and with scenes set in the earlier (year 2000) time frame. This enabled them to consider the impact of previous action(s) on character development and behaviour. The best answers used these routes to make informed critical and even political comment on the effects of de-industrialisation on society, the individual, the blue-collar workers as a social class and upon personal relationships. Some managed to demonstrate eloquently what Nottage means by the 'fractured togetherness' that she leaves her characters in as the curtain falls. A number of the more successful responses made much of the obvious elevation of the character of Oscar both in terms of his position within the bar – from assistant to manager since the last scene set eight years before – and in terms of the newfound respect he is shown by the characters of Chris and Jason. Similarly, there was sometimes a profitable focus on the refurbishment of the bar, which several candidates took to connect with what is generally seen by critics and audiences to be a cautiously optimistic ending to the play (and by extension for America's future). Those candidates who were less successful would have benefited from focusing on these or similar specific details so as to substantiate the points that were made. Indeed, few significant misunderstandings or misconstructions were seen in answers to this question. Some candidates might have improved by starting to directly address the passage very early in their writing: a number of answers tended to include an introductory preamble which commented on Nottage's career or background or upon the play and its setting generally, without making robust links to the question or the specified extract. Such an approach does not necessarily cost candidates marks but does use valuable exam time that could be better spent on making more relevant points or developing existing ideas.

Question 4

EUGENE O'NEILL: *Long Day's Journey Into Night*

- (a) Too few responses to comment.
- (b) Candidates who attempted this question almost all showed a very good understanding of the characters, their relationships and the action of both extract and the wider play. They also demonstrated a very solid ability to proceed in a linear fashion through the extract, responding to its occurrences in an appropriate, relevant and detailed analytical manner. The quality of responses rarely fell below Level 4 and were often in the top two levels because there was some depth of comprehension of the various forms of trauma presented, including addiction, co-dependency, regret, moral dishonesty, blame and unresolved family issues. These stronger candidates tended to analyse language maturely, using literary terms with confidence and demonstrating a degree of psychological insight. They also treated the text as a drama, for example, by giving as much (if not more) weight to O'Neill's stage directions as to the characters' dialogue. Many were able to address the play's overall structure, commenting upon and evaluating the effects of the repetitive nature of the Tyrone family's mutual mistreatment of one another. Candidates tended to resist the temptation of trying to explore the text through the perspective of it being autobiographical and the assumption that the playwright was merely revisiting his own past; indeed, some were able to consider it in the broader context of the moral condition of American society at the time of its setting.

and/or publication. When candidates whose work was somewhere in the top two levels overall went slightly astray, it tended to be through losing sight temporarily of the extract and concentrating too much on the whole text; thus balance was lost in such essays, even though focus invariably returned to the specified passage eventually, sometimes as late as in the final, concluding paragraph. Responses that placed in the lower half of the mark scheme still, however, had a good working knowledge of the events of the play and the characters' individual foibles and weaknesses but tended to respond in a narrative or descriptive rather than analysing or evaluating the text in front of them. In these responses, links were still often made to the rest of the play, and especially to its ending, but they would have perhaps benefited from commenting on the overall relevance of the extract earlier in their essays.

Question 5

WOLE SOYINKA: *Kongi's Harvest*

- (a) Too few responses to comment.
- (b) Too few responses to comment.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/42

Pre- and Post-1900 Poetry and Prose

Key messages

- The context in which the texts were written and/or received is an important aspect of knowledge and understanding. Accuracy and relevance in this aspect are key to success at this level of study.
- Introductions and conclusions to answers frame responses and should be more than repetition of the same information or a rewording of the question.
- Analysis of effects should be relevant to the question and linked to specific aspects of the text and the question asked.

General comments

This was a small entry and not all texts were seen in answers during the course of marking. The most popular texts were *Pride and Prejudice*, Selected Poems from *The Wild Iris* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Answers to these texts therefore form the basis of this report.

Responses demonstrated candidates' enjoyment of both pre- and post-1900 texts. Most answers demonstrated effective engagement. There was no evidence in this series of rubric infringement. It was clear that most candidates had wide-ranging knowledge and understanding of the texts at different ability levels and were well prepared for the questions. The majority of candidates chose to answer **(b)** option questions, but some commendable responses to **(a)** questions were evident. It was apparent that a good number of candidates had applied a strategic approach to their answers through purposeful structure and planning.

Use of wider textual knowledge was a noticeable strength of responses this series, with a sense that most candidates knew how to apply references to other parts of a prose text or poems from the selection/collection when writing about a poem on the **(b)** question. This was noticeable in answers on the poetry of John Donne, Louise Glück and Walt Whitman, as well as in prose works including *Dubliners*, *Pride and Prejudice* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Application of aspects of the context in which works were written and published was less successful this series, with some responses demonstrating no evidence of broader contextual awareness and some making inaccurate comments. Examples include inaccurate references to Jane Austen as a contemporary of Dickens and also, in several answers, as an Elizabethan. Accuracy in context is important to effective understanding of the texts studied. Context can be discussed in literary, social, historical or cultural terms, and points should be made in relation to the focus of the question and arguments put forward. Context may relate to the time in which a work was written, the times it is set in and the reception of different readerships. Examples where context was integrated accurately and purposefully included discussion of the metaphysical genre in Donne's poetry and references to religion in *Dubliners*, for example, Mr Kernan's wife's belief in the banshee suggesting a lack of active practice in Catholicism.

The most effective answers for this series framed their arguments with purposeful and apposite introductions and conclusions. Some candidates wrote thesis statements to open their answers, and this approach tended to be successful, in that it established a direction of thought from which ideas and arguments could unfold and develop. These responses tended to be relevant and concise, often featuring sharp closing comments that expressed relevant concluding ideas. Less successful approaches to introducing answers tended to begin with a general overview of the text, taking some time to reach the focus of the question and sometimes relying on narration or description. Similarly, conclusions to answers should not simply reword the introduction or the terms of the question. Rather, a good conclusion consolidates the journey of the argument throughout the essay, evaluating the overall discussion in response to the question.

Relevant, supported analysis (AO2) is a key feature of successful answers. Improvements in this area were evident this series, particularly in the case of structure and characterisation, with most responses understanding that the presentation of a character is a construct rather than a real person. The best analysis forms an integral part of the essay's argument, with effects considered in the light of the question focus. It is, however, not good practice to list techniques without connecting terms to examples and effects. For example, the line, 'Glück uses imagery, alliteration, free verse and onomatopoeia in her poetry' without exemplification or explanation is unhelpful. Selection of detail to use in analytical discussion is a key part of planning. Some answers reflect a tendency to 'shoehorn' language effects to a point without ensuring that the example supports the progressing argument. It is essential to understand that analysis of form, structure and language all form a significant part of ensuring success at this level of study.

Section A

The majority of candidates wrote answers to *Pride and Prejudice* (**Question 1**), with some answers to questions on the poetry of John Donne and Walt Whitman. In terms of **1(a)**, the focus on the relationship between Lydia and Wickham proved straightforward for most candidates, however some lost focus on the question and wrote about Elizabeth and Darcy, quite extensively in some cases. While it is fine to use other relationships in the novel to shed light on the relationship stated in the question, the terms of the question must be the main focus in answers. The point at which comparison became digression was seen in a number of answers. In answers to **1(b)**, candidates were able to write coherently on the Bennet family, both in the given passage and more widely. Some explored the use of free indirect discourse and considered the contrasts between the Bennet sisters, drawing from the wider novel to develop insights and personal responses.

Candidates writing on the poetry of Donne and Whitman chose the **(b)** option in almost all cases and were able to respond to the given poems, in most cases drawing other poems into answers with relevance and knowledge. Some considered Donne's *Elegy 19* to be a departure from his usual concerns, contrasting it with poems such as *A Valediction Forbidding Mourning*. Arguments about Donne's presentation of lovers tended to offer sensitive readings with some effective application of other opinions and interpretations. *Air and Angels* was used in some answers to convey Donne's preoccupation with the spiritual nature of love and lovers. In responses to Whitman's *Whoever You are Holding Me Now in Hand*, answers demonstrated insight into Whitman's concerns about self-knowledge and sensitive human connections with some links to *Sing the Body Electric*.

Section B

The majority of candidates wrote answers to **7(b)** in this section, focusing on Louise Glück's poem, *Retreating Wind*. Responses reflected knowledge of the wider text, and some interesting interpretations were seen, for example in the idea of alienation from God and the significance of time and mortality. Some arguments were focused on God's perception of humanity and how Glück's use of verse form and imagery support her effects and concerns. Candidates referred to *Matins* and *Vespers* as other examples of her work, often demonstrating secure knowledge.

Candidates answering on *Wide Sargasso Sea*, chose the **(b)** question, focusing on the presentation of Antoinette in a passage from Part 3. Focus on Rhys's use of vivid imagery, and engagement with her characterisation, drove some thoughtful personal responses. Some candidates demonstrated empathy with the character of Antoinette and considered the weight of her past hanging over her. Here, and in responses to the **(b)** question on *Dubliners*, candidates proved able to range across the wider text. Some candidates writing on **8(b)** were able to focus on the question and explore the passage with interest. The best answers developed arguments exploring Joyce's characterisation, including one effective argument linking the presentation of Mr Kernan to contextual points about the marginalisation of Protestants.