

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

<p>Paper 9695/11 Drama and Poetry</p>

Key messages

- Candidates should consider the terms of the question carefully and identify the main area of discussion before selecting relevant material to address the task.
- Although specific references to other parts of the text are not a requirement in **(b)** questions, the most successful responses are informed by a precise context to the passage, related to the main area of discussion in the question.

General comments

The general standard this session was once again satisfactory with candidates achieving marks in the highest levels on nearly every text on the paper. Rubric errors were rare and almost no candidates appeared to have time problems. All but a very few candidates were able to show at least a basic knowledge of their chosen texts and many learners showed evidence of a real enjoyment and engagement with them.

There are two general issues to address this session:

- (a)** Candidates should have a clear approach in mind for addressing the questions. This should include considering the terms of the task carefully, to establish what is the main focus of the question and deciding on their own general response to point at issue. Many questions offer a challenge or proposition on a key area of the text and it is vital, if the candidate is to answer the question relevantly, that this is clearly recognised before the candidate starts to select appropriate material to introduce into the essay. Focusing on the key terms of the task set is an important first step in producing a relevant and focused answer.
- (b)** Passage-based **(b)** questions need detailed focus on the extract printed on the question paper in order to analyse the writing closely. However, knowledge of the rest of the text helps to develop a candidate's argument. When answering a passage-based question candidates will find it helpful to identify the context of the passage early in their answer. This might be what has happened immediately before or is about to happen, or it might be a key moment for a particular character. If the passage is an extract from a longer poem the context would be the wider text. For a complete short poem, the context might be textual or some other appropriate information, for example biographical or historical.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Drama

Question 1

THOMAS MIDDLETON and WILLIAM ROWLEY: *The Changeling*

This was the least popular text on the paper with very few responses on either option.

- (a)** There were relatively few responses seen to this question, though most learners were able to select relevant material from the text around which to structure their response. Weaker answers often summarised the married relationships in the play, focusing on Beatrice and Alsemero, with some able to draw comparisons with Albius and Isabella in the subplot. Better answers at this level were aware that the character in the relationships had different attitudes, contrasting for example

'Beatrice's desire to win Alsemero by any means, fair or foul, with Isabella's quick-witted fidelity to her husband', as one suggested. More competent answers explored the 'odd attitude to marriage shown by Alsemero's use of the 'virgin test' and Beatrice's sacrificing of her wedding night to her waiting maid', as one said. Such ideas were developed in better answers into considering the concerns that were displayed in such attitudes, ranging from 'how men want to control women, differences in gender and class differences', as one essay summarised it. Such ideas were often well supported by specific references to the text. Very good answers analysed how the dramatists use these 'different attitudes as a key tool of characterisation, so that De Flores – a serving man – might enjoy Beatrice's sexual favours but never aspire to be her husband', according to one essay. Others were shocked that 'even at the end Beatrice is ready to confess to murder but still wants to convince her husband she has been faithful to him', an attitude perhaps 'learned from her dominating father', as one suggested. Good answers were aware of how different audiences might respond to such dramatic moments differently – 'the focus on female virtue by so many of the male characters might be seen as normal to the contemporary, not doubt mostly male, audience, but to a modern spectator seems so abusive and controlling', as one stated. Where such arguments were supported by some awareness of context and some analysis of the underlying dramatic methods, the answers did very well.

- (b) There were more answers to this question, though still a minority choice overall. Weak answers often struggled to put the passage in its textual context, seeing the exchange as indicative of 'a troubled relationship where the male is eager for a more physical bond than the woman is ready for.' Better answers at this level did have some knowledge of the overall relationship between De Flores and Beatrice and were able to summarise it, often in detail. The success of this approach was limited by how well any points made were supported from the given passage. Better answers, aware of the context of the murder of Beatrice's fiancé by De Flores at her request, were able to unpick the different attitudes shown here to the question of De Flores's reward. There were some sound discussions of the two characters at this level of response 'her selfish, upper-class attitude to buying him off, sharply contrasted by his desperate, unhealthy lust for her', for example. Other good responses developed this into exploring the effect of 'her naivety and his Machiavellian manoeuvrings' on the audience, who 'might well be shocked by the duplicitous nature of humans in this passage.' Good answers explored a number of related concerns – the effects of murder, her moral degradation here and in the play generally, differences in attitudes to sex, gender and class differences, for example. Very good answers focused on the dramatic methods in developing such ideas. Many at this level noted the 'structural use of asides from Beatrice to reveal her character as realisation of her position dawns on her,' as one said. Others at this level noted how her 'language and attitudes remind us that she is at this stage still a young, even innocent, girl, oblivious to the enormity of what she and De Flores have done,' as one suggested. Others argued that De Flores 'strips away her innocence step by step with his better understanding of the ways of the world', though some learners thought she was 'a girl faced by a predatory, ruthless and controlling man, as signalled by his threatening language and physical intimidation'. Very good answers often explored the dramatic action, the tone and even, for some, 'the almost humorous responses she makes to De Flores's urgent demands'. Where such arguments were linked to appropriate contexts from the wider text, the answers did very well.

Question 2

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Measure for Measure*

Overall, this was the second most popular drama text on the paper, though the majority of learners chose the passage question.

- (a) This was a relatively popular choice, with nearly all learners able to select relevant material with which to address the question. Weaker answers retold more or less relevant parts of the 'story', with many appropriately focusing on Angelo, who 'despite his apparent beliefs in God and morals becomes a hypocrite and virgin-violator', as one argued. Better essays at this level were able to contrast the actions of Angelo and the Duke, and what they revealed about religion, with some linking their arguments to 'Isabella's evident religious beliefs as she is training to be a nun, though this does not prevent both Angelo and the Duke trying to coerce her into a relationship with them', as one summarised it. Sounder answers developed beyond the three central characters. Some, for example, noted 'Lucio's almost deferential words to Isabella at the nunnery,' with others considering how 'Shakespeare contrasts religious and moral attitudes, showing how hypocrisy is rife in both,' as one put it, with Isabella's 'hypocrisy over Marianne as offensive to the audience as is Angelo's abuse of his power'. Good answers noted how the dramatic methods expose and

contrast the different attitudes, so that Angelo's soliloquys, the Duke's disguise as a Friar and Isabella's nun's costume all help the audience to see that religion is a significant force in Vienna. Other good answers saw how the different attitudes created humour through Barnardine, the unmasking of the Duke at the end and even in the exchange between Isabella and Claudio in the prison. Where such arguments were supported by appropriate textual references and some awareness of context, the answers did very well.

- (b) This was the third most popular question in the drama section. Weaker answers often had little or no knowledge of the relevant context, with some learners confused by the relationship between Angelo and Escalus, the nature of Claudio's crime and the context to the entrance of Elbow and his prisoners. Better answers at this level were able to contrast Angelo and Escalus as 'symbols of two very different kinds of justice,' with many noting how the severity of Angelo is 'directly contrasted with Escalus's more lenient approach, especially in his asides', as one learner argued. Successful responses to this question invariably had a clear knowledge and understanding of the textual context and so were alive to the 'dramatic irony of so much of what Angelo says here, just before he encounters Isabella for the first time'. Good answers developed such arguments thoughtfully, noting how 'Escalus, like Isabella, understands that the law is man-made and that there is a higher authority', whereas others saw how 'Shakespeare uses Angelo's arrogance and certainty at this point to set him up for the shock of meeting Isabella and his fall from grace'. Very good answers explored the effects created by the entrance of Elbow and his prisoners, as 'his malapropisms and no doubt some physical, slap-stick humour from the clowns serve to undermine the gravity that Angelo has created'. Others thought the passage showed the underlying corruption of justice in Vienna, 'as the hypocrite Angelo commits worse crimes than Claudio or Pompey are accused of,' according to one. This was developed by those who thought the Duke was no better, 'having created the problem in the first place by his failure to take responsibility', and later in the play using his disguise to 'manipulate honest characters like Isabella, Marianne and the Provost into breaking the law', as one explained. Learners who looked carefully at the language and imagery of the passage, while exploring such concerns, often developed some very good analyses and did very well.

Question 3

WOLE SOYINKA: *The Trials of Brother Jero and Jero's Metamorphosis*

This was not a popular choice of text, with most learners choosing the (b) passage option.

- (a) This was the least popular question on the paper, with only a few learners choosing it. Nearly every response had at least a basic knowledge of the text and some understanding of Soyinka's concerns. Weaker answers tended to focus on Jero himself, summarising his character and actions, at times in great detail and with some accuracy. Better answers at this level also summarised the actions of some of the other beach prophets such as Ananias and Shadrach, who 'at least show that Jero is not as bad as he could be, since he is more honest than they are', as one suggested. Sounder answers developed these contrasts with some clear and specific references to the text. More developed answers noted that the 'prophets are symbolic of different sins', as one suggested, 'even Jero who has pride and lust'. They were also a key element in 'Soyinka's satire of organised religion and how it exploits the gullible', as one said. Some remembered that even the government document refers to them as 'cut-throats and riff-raff'. The beach prophets were 'criminals and hypocrites, only interested in money and power', for some learners. Good answers explored how Soyinka shapes the audience's response in detail: Jero's use of the language of commerce – careers, trade, customers – was analysed well in some responses. The contrasting characterisation of the prophets, how the 'velvet-hearted Jero ruthlessly exploits anyone who falls for his image' was set against 'the thuggery of Ananias and the hypocrisy of Shadrach', for example, was well explored in good essays. Answers at this level also considered Soyinka's use of staging and props, such as the uniforms in *Jero's Metamorphosis* to 'highlight how materialistic and shallow the prophets were', as one essay suggested. Where such arguments were supported by close reference to the text and some appropriate awareness of relevant contexts, the responses were very successful.
- (b) This was the more popular **Question 3** choice. The weakest answers were unable to place the passage in a specific context, often making general comments about Rebecca's role here and in the wider text, suggesting an unfamiliarity with the play. Better answers at this level were able to summarise her actions in the wider text and in particular her relationship with Jero, briefly touched on in the passage. Her femininity and beauty were often discussed at this level, though not always

linked to the passage. Sounder answers saw her as ‘a foolish religious enthusiast, taken in by Jero’s religious cant’, according to one. Others developed this, noting her sharpness in dealing with the executive and the clerk. Some noted the comedy of the situation, as ‘the executive finds himself out manoeuvred by a mere woman’, as one said. This concern was often well explored, with some learners seeing ‘more proof of the misogynistic culture that Soyinka is satirising’. Other learners saw her as a symbol for ‘female victims of the male gaze everywhere, yet gutsy and confident in herself’, as one suggested. Her characterisation though also included ‘her blindness in thinking Jero has saved her, when he is in fact exploiting her, because of the file’, and for some she was not ‘naïve at all but exploiting the situation just like all the other characters’. Good answers analysed some of the language and dramatic action, how, for example, she is ‘young woman, young lady, religious maniac, all terms used to undermine her’, though for others her use of religious language ‘twisting everything the executive says is very comedic’. Good answers were alive to her significance in Jero’s scheming and how she is a sympathetic character in this play, contrasting with Amope’s role in the first play, because ‘she is there to develop the reader’s positive response to Jero himself’, as one essay argued. Very good essays developed their arguments with precise reference to the passage and the wider text, integrating contextual points and some perceptive analysis of language, action and tone.

Question 4

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

This was the most popular text on the paper with most learners choosing the **(b)** passage option.

- (a)** This was the third most popular question on the paper. Nearly every response was able to find relevant material with which to address the task. Weaker answers retold the story of their relationship, often with detailed knowledge of the text and in some cases showing understanding of the significance of some of their actions. Better ones at this level did explore the characters as well as their actions. Many noted ‘Maggie’s neediness and craving for attention from Brick’, while others contrasted this with ‘the way Brick hides behind indifference and alcohol’. Sounder answers developed such ideas, linking these behaviours to ‘Williams’s themes of how the emptiness of the American Dream is reflected in the emptiness of the relationships in the play’, as one learner suggested. Other answers explored how Brick and Maggie are contrasted with Mae and Gooper, as well as with Big Daddy and Big Mama, with some seeing how ‘these contrasts and parallels help the audience to see that Brick and Maggie are central to the play’s meaning, because they are a more relatable couple than the others’. Good answers noted the significance of Skipper to their relationship: ‘Brick’s latent homosexuality is like Big Daddy’s cancer, misdiagnosed and ultimately destructive’, as one learner suggested. Many good answers explored Williams’s presentation of sexuality through their relationship, looking, for example, at Brick’s language to Big Daddy, Maggie’s actions and words to prove herself to Brick and how Williams contrasts them positively with ‘the disgustingly fecund Mae and Gooper, whose children are merely weapons to win the prize of Big Daddy’s fortune’, as one essay suggested. Very good answers were focused on the dramatic methods, noting that ‘the play’s setting in Brick and Maggie’s bedroom makes them central to everything, whilst also highlighting the public nature of the relationship and the family’s interest in their sexuality’, as one put it. They were also seen as central to ‘Williams’s exploration of wealth, through Brick’s indifference and Maggie’s desperation to keep it because of her childhood poverty’. Contrasts with Mae and Gooper on this point were often well developed, alongside the different attitudes to children, Big Daddy and the possible inheritance. Many answers were able to support such arguments with detailed and precise textual references and with a perceptive grasp of relevant and at times illuminating contexts, from Williams’s biography and American life and attitudes in the 1950s.
- (b)** This was the second most popular question on the paper. Weaker answers often struggled to place the passage in the context of the wider text, though did have some knowledge of the characters and the relationship. Most were also able to shape their responses to address the task, in terms of audience response. At this level answers tended to be quite narrative in their approach, telling the story of Brick and Big Daddy’s relationship in detail. The success of this approach was determined how well the narrative choices were connected to the given passage. Better answers were aware of the rising tension between the characters and many referred to some of the dramatic devices, though analysis was often limited. The use of stage directions, the setting of the bedroom, the fireworks and children in the background were often highlighted as effecting how the audience might respond. More competent answers, often aware of the preceding discussions about Skipper, were able to develop such ideas, noting how ‘Big Daddy’s increasing anxiety, signalled through his

language, repetition and stage directions, is contrasted with Brick's seeming indifference', as one suggested, though others also noted that 'Brick's demeanour, acting gravely and soberly and his stillness at the end of the extract make the audience understand the high emotions here', and others noted that 'this is still a father and son, facing a terrible situation together', as one learner put it. Good answers noted how many of the play's concerns, such as sexuality, mendacity and 'the characters' inability to communicate their emotions', are developed in this scene. Other good answers explored the dramatic methods in more detail, such as the use of pathetic fallacy, the 'symbolic crying of Gooper's child', the use of capitals to suggest raised voices and the dramatic action with Big Daddy 'going from quick, decisive movements in grabbing the crutch to his crumbling face as the fear of death takes hold'. Very good answers also looked at the language, with Williams's use of repetition, the violence of Big Daddy's words, the interjections from the children and Mae, the significance of the off-stage song, all well discussed and analysed. Many saw the significance of the passage for the audience as 'watching how Big Daddy changes from the ruthless, strong patriarch into a defeated dying human before our eyes', as one said. Such interpretations, where supported by precise references and appreciation of Williams's dramatic choices, were very successful.

Section B: Poetry

Question 5

SIMON ARMITAGE: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

This was a relatively popular text in **Section B** with most learners choosing the **(b)** passage option.

- (a)** Nearly every answer was able to select relevant material with which to address the task. Weaker answers retold the narrative, often in detail, with better ones at this level offering some personal responses, ranging from 'he is like a comic book monster in Arthur's castle', to 'though frightening in his size and strength, it is also a bit comic when he rides out of the hall, holding his head under his arm'. Better answers developed this contrast by looking at Armitage's choices in more detail – his size, his colour and his language were often analysed in detail. More competent responses remembered that the Host and the Green Knight 'are one and the same character, Sir Bertilak', as one noted. This enabled some learners to explore Armitage's use of contrasts and structure in building up to the climax of Sir Gawain's keeping his promise. Good answers often explored the mythical qualities of his presentation, with some good use of contexts and textual support. The symbolic nature of the Green Knight, his castle and even the green girdle was often well discussed, and many good answers contrasted his description with that of Sir Gawain and, in some cases, also King Arthur. Themes such as justice, chivalry and honour were often well explored at this level. Other very good answers noted Armitage's development of the Green Knight from 'a threatening, murderous enemy into an understanding human, chivalrous host and even a friend', as one suggested. Very good answers always revealed a thorough and perceptive knowledge of the text and its context, as well as an ability to explore Armitage's style analytically.
- (b)** This was a popular choice on this text and the third most popular **Section B** question. Weaker answers sometimes struggled with some of the details of the poem, at times suggesting the extract was being discussed as an unseen. Better answers at this level were able to give a broad context, often referring to 'Sir Gawain back in the castle, about to become the prey of the host's wife', as one noted. Most were aware of the 'hustle and bustle created by Armitage in this passage', noting that 'everyone in the court seemed to be caught up in the excitement of the hunt', as one learner suggested. More competent answers explored some of the poetic methods – the use of alliteration, how 'all of the senses are invoked by Armitage's descriptions', and the use of specific detail, such as 'the three bellowing notes'. Others explored the effects of the animal imagery in words such as 'wolfing'. Good answers also discussed Armitage's concerns: humans and nature, violence, hunting as a theme, predators and prey – with good links to Sir Gawain and the Lady – and conflict, were all well considered. The scene for some was 'an insight into the everyday life of a male dominated castle', as one suggested, though the 'contrast of this scene with Sir Gawain pretending to sleep', was also well discussed. Very good answers noted the 'sudden intrusion of the narrator who is neither the Green Knight nor Sir Gawain', and considered this made the 'scene more immediate and credible', as one suggested. Very good answers also linked the passage thoughtfully to the wider text and often had a very good grasp of relevant contexts.

Question 6

ROBERT BROWNING: Selected Poems

This was a minority choice of text in this session, with the **(b)** passage option marginally the more popular choice.

- (a)** Nearly every answer was able to select relevant poems with which to address the task. Popular choices of poems included *The Laboratory*, *Porphyria's Lover*, *My Last Duchess* and *Women and Roses*, though overall a wide range of poems were selected and often relevantly discussed. Weaker answers were at times unsure of the content of their chosen poems, suggesting a lack of knowledge and understanding, though most answers at this level were comfortable in paraphrasing what happened in the poems. Better answers at this level tended to summarise the characters involved. For example, 'The Duke in *My Last Duchess* is obsessive and controlling, just like the lover in *Porphyria's Lover*, and both of them murder their partners out of jealousy', as one learner stated. More competent answers identified a range of 'strong emotions' in the poems: 'Browning writes about all emotions from jealousy and hatred, to love and desire', as one learner summarised it, with stronger answers at this level often considering language and imagery in detail, particularly 'the violence of the Duke's words in *My Last Duchess* and the sinister, almost gleeful words of poison of the scorned woman in *The Laboratory*', as one essay said. Good answers developed such points into considering Browning's typical concerns: male dominance, obsessive behaviour, jealousy and envy of rivals, lovers and colleagues, desire and passion were all well discussed and exemplified. Answers at this level were also adept at considering a wide range of poetic methods, with Browning's use of the dramatic monologue – and hence unreliable narrators –, characterisation and surprising plot twists, often considered alongside the more obvious poetic choices of rhythm and rhyme. Many good essays, for example, considered pathetic fallacy an important aspect of Browning's writing, 'whether to emphasise violence as seen in *Porphyria's Lover* or to exaggerate desire in *Meeting at Night*', as one suggested. Very good answers also integrated relevant and at times illuminating contexts, often biographical or historical, into their discussions, as well as precise and accurate quotation from the text.
- (b)** Weaker answers were often unsure of the context for this extract from a much longer poem, suggesting uneven knowledge of the text. This led to some insecure readings of the passage, such as 'the Mayor wants the piper to get rid of the rats, but he gets rid of the children'. More successful answers at this level did know the details of the poem's story and were at times distracted into retelling it, with a consequent lack of focus on the given extract. Some answers were able to consider the significance of the passage in terms of the overall story: 'the metaphorical "rats" in the town hall think that they can get one over the piper, but of course they can not', as one put it. More competent answers considered Browning's concerns, with some seeing this as a conflict between the different classes, or 'his satire of the greed and corruption of those in power at the expense of the apparently weak and helpless', as one essay stated. Others noted how 'the pragmatism of the council is set against the magic realism of the time and space travelling Piper'. Good answers explored the language in detail, often contrasting the words of the Mayor and the Piper to good effect. Other good answers noted Browning's use of symbols, such as the wine and the children, to establish the contrasting views. Only a few learners were able to explore Browning's use of rhyme and versification with any confidence, though these were useful areas for detailed analysis. Very good answers were often able to integrate references to the wider text and relevant contexts, as a useful means of developing their arguments about the given passage.

Question 7

GILLIAN CLARKE: Selected Poems

This was a minority choice overall, with most learners choosing the **(b)** passage option.

- (a)** This was one of the least popular questions on the paper. Nearly every answer was able to select relevant poems, with which to address the task. Popular choices of poem included *Catrin*, *Seal*, *Scything* and *Baby-sitting*, all of which provided useful material, often contrasting in tone, for learners to shape their responses. Weaker answers were at times confused about the details, though many at this level had a clear basic grasp of the events in their chosen poems. This enabled most answers to address the question in part – 'in what ways' – and often, with a considered choice of poems, include a broad contrast of Clarke's attitudes and approaches to 'mothers'. More competent answers also addressed the second part of the task – 'with what effects'

– for example discussing how ‘Clarke undermines the human mother’s inability to let go in *Catrin* by showing how the seal by instinct knows when to leave her pup behind’, as one suggested. Good answers considered Clarke’s poetic methods in detail – the use of contrasting settings, the ‘simple domestic situations of gardening or staying out late, she uses to explore themes of life and death and growing up’. Most importantly for many learners her use of symbols, ‘which force the reader into feeling certain emotions – the abandoned seal pup, the unbroken umbilical chord and the grim reaper’s scythe’, as one suggested. Other good responses explored language and imagery in detail, with, at times, very good analysis of the extended metaphor of the umbilical chord and its effects. Biographical context was often well integrated into the discussion at this level of performance as well as precise, detailed references to the text.

- (b) This was the more popular choice on this text but overall only a minority of learners chose it. Some weak answers had little knowledge of the poem and appeared to be responding as to an unseen, with limited success. Better answers were able to give an accurate summary of the poem, though some learners tried to explain exactly what the narrative was line by line, without giving an overview of the poem on which to build their interpretation. At this level analysis tended to be limited to ‘feature spotting’ such as: ‘similes are used in the presentation of the young woman’, or ‘Clarke uses specific language to make her points clear’, without providing examples or further commentary. Some learners, even more competent ones, avoided discussion of the final lines of the poem, with a consequent weakening of the interpretations offered. More competent learners understood the use of the two parts to shift from one place to another and from one tone to another, with some noticing that the parts were of different lengths. The difference ‘between the gentle death of the woman and the ghastly after-shock for those left behind’, as one put it, was well explored by good responses, with some learners analysing how the language differentiated the two. At this level, learners were able to see the poem as a whole rather than as a sequence of lines, and were more successful in establishing meaningful elements of the presentation. Very good answers analysed the poetic methods in detail, for example the metaphor of the yacht and ‘how it symbolized her journey into the next life’, or for others ‘represented her fragility and that she was going on a journey’. Other good responses analysed the effects of the white sheet, ‘which linked back to the yacht and its sails, even though she is in bed at home, thinking she is in bed in a hospital,’ as one put it. Very good answers also explored the ‘sheer depth of contrast between the hot, gentle, silent day and the weeping, huddling, support of the pub scene’, as one suggested. Many good answers explored the language and imagery in detail, though only a few were able to consider poetic form with the same confidence. Where answers were informed by appropriate contextual references the essays often did very well.

Question 8

Songs of Ourselves, Volume 2

This was the most popular **Section B** text, though the vast majority of learners chose the passage (b) option.

- (a) This was very much the minority choice on this text. Nearly all of the responses were able to select relevant poems with which to address the task, though some weaker learners were insecure in their knowledge of the poems they had chosen. Popular choices were *The Buck in the Snow*, *Australia 1970*, *The Spring* and *The Sea and the Hills*. Basic responses tended to summarise their chosen poems, pointing out in what ways they were linked to nature, with more organised responses at this level achieving the required ‘comparison’ through the structure of their essays. Better answers at this level chose contrasting poems to emphasise the comparisons being made. Essays at this level sometimes offered a too-literal description of the poems, concentrating on meaning, with little appreciation of the poetic methods. More competent answers did consider how the poets ‘present the natural world’, often looking closely at language and imagery, noting for example how ‘the violent words are sometimes at odds with the peacefulness of the setting’, or ‘how the natural world is brutal as an innocent buck in a picturesque setting was fated to have a violent death’. Good candidates were able to develop such ideas with understanding of the poetic concerns: the human impact on nature – generally seen as malign –, the violence of natural forces, the essential beauty of nature, and nature’s capacity to inspire, heal and nurture. Very good answers were able to integrate contextual references within an essay structured around the comparison of the poems. Many responses, at all levels, revealed a personal engagement with and some empathy towards many of the poems considered. As one essay suggested, ‘human disregard for nature and its creatures is contrasted with the consolation that nature can bring to the broken-hearted’.

- (b) This was the most popular question on the paper with nearly half of the entry choosing it. Some very weak answers had little knowledge of the poem and appeared to be responding as to an unseen, with limited success at unpicking some of Louisa Lawson's references and concerns. Basic answers often had at least some understanding of Lawson's poem and were able to offer a generally relevant summary, though at this level there were unsupported speculations and assertions about the identity of 'she', from 'a famous but not forgotten queen' to 'a murdered heiress buried in the mud'. There was in these essays little focus on either the poetic methods or their effects. Some weaker answers did identify literary features such as imagery, simile and caesura but were only able to do so without analytical commentary. More competent answers were often aware of appropriate contexts and were able to relate them to their interpretation, most often Lawson's 'feminism' and religion, linking 'her self-sacrifice in the poem to Jesus's sacrifice on the cross', as one suggested, though few were aware of the biblical reference in the title. At this level learners often considered the question/answer structure of the poem, the 'language of sacrifice and battle' as one put it, and some of the structure of the verses. Good answers developed the analysis further, noting for example 'the shift from past to present tense which makes 'she' relevant to the current reader', as one noted. Other good answers discussed the various concerns in the poem: women's rights, abuse of power, passion contrasted with indifference, the power of the individual to effect change and social and gender injustice were all well explored, often with personal engagement. There were many engaged and fully analytical responses seen, showing a secure, and at times a sophisticated grasp of the literary features Lawson employs to present the 'she' in the poem. Very good answers often integrated the contextual points seamlessly and explored the nature of the dialogue itself – 'women of the past and present, both young and old or wise and ignorant are all included in this conversation', as one suggested. Others noted the effects of the rhymes and the 'shifts between positive and negative language as 'she' is revealed to the reader to be an emblematic symbol of the struggle central to the female experience', as one expressed it.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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

Key messages

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- Although specific references to other parts of the text are not a requirement in **(b)** questions, the most successful responses are informed by a precise context to the passage, related to the main area of discussion in the question.

General comments

The general standard this session was once again satisfactory with candidates achieving marks in the highest levels on nearly every text on the paper. Rubric errors were rare and almost no candidates appeared to have time problems. All but a very few candidates were able to show at least a basic knowledge of their chosen texts and many learners showed evidence of a real enjoyment and engagement with them.

There are two general issues to address this session:

- (a)** Candidates should have a clear approach in mind for addressing the questions. This should include considering the terms of the task carefully, to establish what is the main focus of the question and deciding on their own general response to point at issue. Many questions offer a challenge or proposition on a key area of the text and it is vital, if the candidate is to answer the question relevantly, that this is clearly recognised before the candidate starts to select appropriate material to introduce into the essay. Focusing on the key terms of the task set is an important first step in producing a relevant and focused answer.
- (b)** Passage-based **(b)** questions need detailed focus on the extract printed on the question paper in order to analyse the writing closely. However, knowledge of the rest of the text helps to develop a candidate's argument. When answering a passage-based question candidates will find it helpful to identify the context of the passage early in their answer. This might be what has happened immediately before or is about to happen, or it might be a key moment for a particular character. If the passage is an extract from a longer poem the context would be the wider text. For a complete short poem, the context might be textual or some other appropriate information, for example biographical or historical.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Drama

Question 1

THOMAS MIDDLETON and WILLIAM ROWLEY: *The Changeling*

This was the least popular text on the paper with very few responses overall.

- (a)** There were too few responses to this question to be able to make a general comment on performance.
- (b)** There were only a few answers to this question. Nearly every response was able to offer relevant opinions about the relationship. Very weak answers had an insecure knowledge of the text

generally and consequently the relationship, where speculations such as ‘they are obviously about to get married’, severely hampered the success of the interpretations offered. Better answers did have knowledge and understanding of the preceding murder of Alonzo and were better able to discuss the significance of the passage to the relationship. Weaker answers retold the events leading up to this exchange, with more successful answers interlacing their summary with pertinent comments about ‘her moral and social outrage is contrasted to his unrelenting pursuit of her virginity’, as one said. More competent answers noted how the dramatists use this exchange to explore many of the play’s wider concerns: gender issues, male abuse and control of women, attitudes to sexuality and class differences. Such discussions were more successful when they were explored in the context of their relationship and Middleton and Rowley’s methods of characterisation. Beatrice’s ‘innocence and perhaps gullibility are starkly exposed here as she becomes aware of the seriousness of what she has done and the terrible consequences she now has to face’, as one suggested. De Flores was seen as ‘the true villain, who following the cruel murder of Alonzo now uses it to blackmail Beatrice into a sexual relationship’, though others were more condemnatory, ‘as this is little more than a shocking abuse of Beatrice’s situation by a predatory rapist,’ as one said. Very good answers looked closely at the language differences, ‘her pleading and begging, is in sharp contrast to his ruthless language of threat and coercion and to her own cursing of him earlier in the play’, as one noted. Where such points were supported by precise reference to the passage, the answers did well.

Question 2

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Measure for Measure*

This was a popular choice of text in this session, with most learners choosing the passage **(b)** option.

- (a)** Learners who chose this question generally had at least a basic knowledge of the text on which to base their responses. Weaker answers tended to focus on the Duke, disguised as a Friar, and retold his involvement in the play in their own words. The success of this approach increased as the learner revealed more awareness of the dramatic effects of his disguise. ‘It is a shocking moment for those on stage when Lucio pulls off his hood to reveal it is the Duke’, as one suggested. Better answers making this point added that ‘the audience, of course, knows only too well that the Friar is the Duke, and this created comedy when he is talking to Lucio’, as one explained. More competent answers ranged more widely in the text, considering Mariana’s disguise as Isabella, the head of the murder used to represent Claudio and Elbow’s disguise as a tapster. Again, better answers at this level discussed the dramatic effects, rather than only explaining the situation. Good answers expanded the concept of disguise, with many suggesting that Angelo was ‘even more disguised than the Duke, hiding his lust and depravity beneath his stern, puritan exterior’, according to one, before integrating contextual knowledge and understanding by exploring Shakespeare’s ‘satire of puritanism’ more generally. Angelo’s disguise was seen as ‘the central plank in the structure of the play’s plot’, as one essay noted, though for others it was ‘the source of nearly all the moral dilemmas on stage – should the Duke act more directly, does Isabella give in to him and what is real justice’, as one learner summarised it. Some good responses saw disguise in nearly all of the characters, from Isabella, ‘who is disguised to herself and her brother’, to the Provost ‘who disguises what he really knows to avoid trouble’. Very good answers explored how such ambivalence ‘created dramatic tension and were important in Shakespeare’s characterisation’, as one noted. Very good answers were well structured and organised, controlling their selected material so that argument, support and analysis were given equal weight in a focused and sophisticated interpretation of the play and its contexts.
- (b)** Nearly every response was able to address the task relevantly. Weaker responses summarised the connection between Angelo and Isabella, though at times unsure as to where this particular exchange occurred. Some answers at this level lost focus by retelling the full history of their relationship, with a consequent loss of focus on the detail of the passage. Better responses at this level considered the two characters, as individuals, noting ‘that her attempts to change his mind show her innocence and immaturity, in the face of his unshakeable certainty that his in the right’, as one said. More successful responses to this question invariably had a clear knowledge and understanding of the textual context, competent answers discussing, for example, ‘how the characters at this stage are like lawyers arguing a legal point’, with some showing how ‘his coldness is soon to be penetrated by her passion for her brother’s life’. Good answers explored the contrasts and similarities in their language and imagery, suggesting ‘they are more alike than they think and both are about to be shocked into fundamental changes’, as one put it. Many good answers noted that ‘Angelo’s “tomorrow” is the crux word that changes this scene and the course

of the play, as Isabella suddenly realises the gravity of Claudio's situation and her genuine concerns for his life rush to the surface', as one said. At this level there was awareness of the dramatic situation, the significance of 'her sudden passion' in its effect on Angelo, the role of Lucio and the setting of 'the judge's chambers with inevitably the man in charge dominating the weak, powerless woman', as one put it. Very good answers analysed the details of language, imagery and dramatic action carefully, noting how Shakespeare 'develops the dramatic tension in terms of their relationship, using the seriousness of the point at issue, Claudio's life', as one suggested. Others explored Angelo's dismissive words and behaviour, his 'pompous legal justification of the sentence, which Isabella so neatly, at the end, turns into a personal comment on Angelo as a tyrant', as one expressed it. Answers which supported such arguments with close reference to the passage and awareness of textual contexts did very well.

Question 3

WOLE SOYINKA: *The Trials of Brother Jero and Jero's Metamorphosis*

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

Question 4

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

- (a) This was a popular question overall though a minority choice on this text. Weaker answers tended to list the various parent and child combinations and summarise the story of the relationships, with little awareness of Williams's dramatic methods. Better answers at this level often concentrated on Brick's relationship with Big Daddy, with some general sense of how it is presented, through their one-to-one dialogues. More competent responses saw how the relationships are contrasted, nearly always referring to Brick and Gooper's very different attitudes to Big Daddy and at times Big Mama. These relationships were seen as revealing many of the play's concerns such as attitudes to wealth, ambition, rivalry and sexuality. Mae and Maggie were also contrasted in their differing attitudes to children, with many suggesting that 'Maggie clearly does not like the "no-neck monsters" and only wants a child to secure the inheritance', as one learner suggested. Good answers did focus on the dramatic presentation, with some seeing this relationship as a 'a key tool in Williams's characterisation'. Other learners analysed the language carefully, noting, for example, how Mae and Gooper react when Big Mama calls Brick her only son. Symbols were also well discussed at this level: the cashmere scarf, the legal papers and the morphine, for example. Very good answers considered the effects of the dramatic methods, noting how the sibling rivalry 'created tension and conflict in the play', as one learner suggested. The use of stage directions, dramatic actions such as the smacking of the child, and untimely entrances and exits were all well analysed. Overall, though, it was considered that the dramatic exchanges were the crucial element in the presentation, which enabled Williams to explore 'the cruelty and the emotions generated by a dysfunctional family', as one said. Where such interpretations were supported by detailed reference to the text and an appreciation of relevant contexts, the answers did very well.
- (b) This was a very popular question overall with nearly half of the entry choosing it. Weaker answers tended to summarise what happened to Maggie in the play, with only a general awareness of the passage. Better answers at this level linked their comments and personal response to some details from the passage, with many answers noting her 'chattiness which is casual but also appears to be a nervous reaction', as one learner suggested. She was variously considered catty, lonely, jealous, desperate, smart and humorous, with the majority of learners having some sympathy for her situation. More competent answers recognised Williams's methods of characterisation in her language and in her attitudes to some of the central concerns: wealth, status, class and children. This last concern was often discussed as 'a key issue in understanding Maggie', as one suggested. 'Her attitudes to Mae and Gooper's children reveal she does not like children', though other answers considered 'her desire for a child is never maternal but simply to help them get Big Daddy's fortune', as one essay summarised it. Good answers noted her language choices and were able to analyse the humour in her description of the family party. Other essays concentrated more on her relationship with Brick, for whom 'she appears to be performing, trying desperately to get his attention', as one essay noted. Her self-awareness and need to be desired were much commented on, with the significance of the mirror well analysed in some good answers. Very good answers considered the effects of Williams's dramatic choices – the stage directions, her changing moods, her tone of voice and, for some most importantly, Brick's responses or lack of them, were all 'open to interpretation so that the audience is as bemused by her as Brick seems to be', as one

essay argued. Other very good answers explored her 'choric function, so that the audience learns about the family tensions and conflicts at this early stage of the play', as one learner stated. Where such points were supported by precise references to the passage and some appreciation of relevant contexts the essays did well.

Section B: Poetry

Question 5

SIMON ARMITAGE: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

This was the least popular text in **Section B** with only a small minority of responses, nearly all of whom chose the passage **(b)** question.

- (a)** There were too few responses to this question to be able to make a general comment on performance
- (b)** There were only few answers to this and all of them had at least a basic knowledge and understanding of the text on which to base their responses. Weaker answers responded to the gory detail of the Green Knight's beheading, often paraphrasing the events, though with limited grasp of its significance. Better answers at this level had some awareness of style, noting, for example, how 'Armitage uses a matter of fact descriptive tone to describe the gruesome action', as one learner commented. More competent answers developed this idea, commenting on the omniscient narrator and the 'highly descriptive way the scene is portrayed', as one noted, citing Armitage's use of detail and repetition. Good answers analysed the action and the methods more closely, with some finding the 'image of the head being kicked like a football almost humorous', though others noted how 'the tone becomes more sinister', as the headless torso recovers the head and mounts his horse. Good answers also considered Armitage's poetic methods, such as language and alliteration, and there were good analyses of alliterative verse, which became very good as the effects of the poet's choices were discussed. For example, one essay noted how 'the smoothness of the strike is shown in the repeated "f"s of "the fat and flesh so far"', while another essay referred to how the strength and determination of Gawain is reflected in the short plosive sounds of 'plants his left foot firmly'. Very good answers were aware of the significance of this action to the poem as a whole, integrating wider text references to show good understanding and appropriate contexts to show secure knowledge.

Question 6

ROBERT BROWNING: Selected Poems

This was a relatively popular choice overall in this session.

- (a)** This was the minority choice of question on this text. Popular poems to address the task were: *A Light Woman*, *Porphyria's Lover*, *My Last Duchess*, *The Bishop Orders His Tomb at St Praxed's Church* and *Confessions*. Desire was generally seen as a negative emotion, leading to at best disappointment and at worst murder. Weaker answers were nearly always able to summarise the poems accurately and add some personal response as a commentary. Better answers at this level had some understanding of Browning's concerns and, with careful choice of poems, the response often had an implicit contrast in the different effects that desire might have. For example, 'the Bishop desires a wonderful tomb so he will never be forgotten, but in *Confessions* he wants to remember how his desires were fulfilled when he was alive', as one summarised it. More competent answers explored the power of desire, as a key effect on the various narrators. This included the Bishop's desire for the trappings of wealth, the speaker's desire for revenge in *The Laboratory* the Duke's desire for control in *My Last Duchess* all of which 'show how desire leads people to break their vows, to violence and cruelty, and even murder', as one summarised it. Others discussed how desire is 'more important than religious or moral principles', citing the Bishop from St Praxed's and the Mayor of Hamelin. Good answers considered how Browning presents desire. Many learners had secure understanding of the dramatic monologue and first-person narrators and were able to analyse some of their effects in their chosen poems. Other good answers looked at language and imagery – the poison in *The Laboratory*, the use of nature in *The Last Ride Together* and the storm in *Porphyria's Lover* were at times well analysed. Very good answers also considered Browning's use of pathetic fallacy and especially symbols, with the roses in *Women and Roses* and the picture in *My Last Duchess* proving fruitful ground for developed,

perceptive analysis. Such answers always supported points with close reference to the poem and an appreciation of appropriate contexts.

- (b) Weaker answers sometimes struggled with some of the details of the poem, at times suggesting the extract was being discussed as an unseen. This inevitably limited the success of any interpretation offered. More capable responses at this level did have knowledge of the poem and, at times, understanding enough to offer a personal response to the speaker's situation, often noting the how 'the speaker changes from hero to villain, though the details are kept vague by Browning', as one summarised it. Competent answers were often more directed and focused in their arguments and could move beyond paraphrase and summary. Answers at this level were alive to the shifting moods of the speaker, and where this was supported by awareness of Browning's choices of language and imagery, the answers did well. These answers often explored Browning's use of dramatic monologue and where this led to discussions about the first-person narrator and the effects such as immediacy and reader engagement, the answers became good. At this level there was some awareness of the wider text, with links made to poems such as *The Lost Leader* evidencing good knowledge of the text. Other good answers were wide ranging in the choice of poetic methods analysed, with some able to link the poetic metre to the rhythm of the rider at the start and his execution at the end. As awareness of the effects of the poetic choices became more analytical, such as how the 'the speaker moves from a glorious past in events and verb tense into a miserable present', as one essay remarked, so did the answers become more successful. These answers often considered the verse form – 'a ballad style and therefore a narrative', as one learner noticed – and symbols, such as the roses and the gallows. Very good answers combined such analytical shrewdness with a thorough knowledge and understanding of the poem, shaping their interpretation to the question and supporting by appropriate contextual details.

Question 7

GILLIAN CLARKE: Selected Poems

This was a minority choice overall, with most learners choosing the (b) passage option.

- (a) There were only a few responses to this question, with most learners able to select relevant poems with which to address the task. Popular choices were *Ichthyosaur*, *Lunchtime Lecture*, *Sunday*, *Ram*, *Apples* and *Cold Knap Lake*. Weaker responses were nearly always able to summarise their selected poems, with success dependent on how relevant the personal views and comments were. Better answers at this level did shape their summaries to show they related to the past and at times showed understanding of some of Clarke's concerns: how the past influences the present, continuity of life, life and death, and, for most learners the most important, memory. More competent answers shaped their argument around these concerns directly. Childhood memories of the past were seen as influencing Clarke's view of the world, such as 'the tension and lack of affection in her childhood home creating her own attitudes to children in for example *Catrin* and *Baby Sitting*,' as one learner suggested. Sound answers also considered some of Clarke's poetic methods, the 'cold, analytical tone in for example *Ichthyosaur* showing a lack of emotion', as one learner noted, though others thought the 'memories of childbirth, such as the umbilical chord and the blood in *Catrin* suggest a traumatic experience still haunting her'. Very good answers analysed some of the methods in detail, especially Clarke's language choices 'often graphic and shocking, such as the skull in *Ram*', as one learner said. Imagery, symbols and verse form were also very well discussed at this level. These answers often had precise references to the poems, an awareness of contexts and some appreciation of the different ways the poems might be interpreted, so that *Cold Knap Lake* 'might be a childhood memory in which her mother was a heroine or a half-remembered nightmare where "All lost things lie", including innocence', as one learner perceptively argued. Nearly every answer thought the past was central to Clarke's view of the world, 'since change and natural transformations are central to all life, including humans'.
- (b) This was a popular choice of question. Weaker answers at times struggled with some of the details of the poem, such as 'musk' and 'cromlechs', suggesting the poem was being discussed as an unseen. Interpretations built on uneven knowledge were nearly always restricted and unconvincing. Better answers at this level did have a basic knowledge and understanding and produced a relevant summary of the poem's events and the relationship between the dog and the hare. More competent answers saw this relationship in terms of predator and prey, the cruelty of nature and the cycle of life, with some essays linking these concerns to the wider text. Good answers considered the language and at times its effects, so that 'the use of "courted" makes it sound like a romance', as one learner suggested. Other good answers analysed the description of the hare:

'beautiful in life and death', though others saw 'Clarke's typical gruesome focus on gory details, such as the blood and snapped rib', as one learner summarised it. There was good analysis of the dog as well, the excitement of the hunt and the effect of the word 'gift' often well discussed. Very good answers saw the poem metaphorically as well. As one suggested 'on the surface a simple tale of the countryside seems to represent the violent cruelty of life', while for others 'the beauty of the natural world is contrasted with the violence and harshness of life in it'. Very good answers did consider poetic methods, the imagery of the seasons, the versification and Clarke's use of free verse were well discussed at this level. Where there was precise supporting quotation from the poem, appropriate reference to the wider text and relevant contexts, the answers did very well.

Question 8

Songs of Ourselves, Volume 2

This was the most popular **Section B** text, though the vast majority of learners chose the passage **(b)** option.

- (a)** There were only a few responses to this question. Most learners were able to choose relevant poems to address the task, with popular choices including *In the Park*, *The Storm-Wind*, *Father Returning Home* and *Stabat Mater*. Very weak answers struggled with some of the details of their choices and were unable to find relevant material to answer the question. Better answers at a basic level were able to summarise the poems and shape their supporting personal responses relevantly, though some were distracted into discussing their own homes and limiting the development of their arguments. More competent answers were more focused on the task, often choosing contrasting poems in order to have comparison and contrast built into their argument. This worked well with *Father Returning Home* and *Stabat Mater*, for example. At this level, knowledge and understanding were sound so that arguments about the 'dreariness of homelife', or 'the lack of love and emotion', were always rooted in the specifics of the text. Good answers considered poetic methods in detail, most often language and imagery. For example, 'calling him Mr Hunt tells the reader how distant and formal the husband and wife relationship was, reflecting the child's home', as one learner argued. Other good answers considered the poetic methods, such as voice, point of view, use of rhymes and verse form, often building in a contrast between their chosen poems. These answers became very good as the depth of analysis increased, along with the selection of supporting quotations and, in some cases, an awareness of appropriate contexts.
- (b)** This was the most popular choice of question on the paper. Weaker answers at times struggled with some of the details of the poem, suggesting it was being discussed as an unseen. This inevitably limited the success of any interpretation offered. Better answers at this level had at least a basic knowledge of the poem to support their personal responses. Recognising the poem was about 'a broken relationship and the heartbreak that follows', some learners were distracted into recounting their own experiences, with a consequent loss of focus on the poem. More competent answers had a sound overview of the poem, 'the speaker's spiritual awakening from the depths of a lovelorn depression', as one learner summarised it. This enabled some answers to explore how Raine presents the changing moods of the speaker, with many noting how the poem is split into two halves. Better answers at this level discussed some of Raine's concerns, such as the healing power of nature, the fragility of human relationships, the search for tranquillity and the calmness after the passion. Good responses developed these ideas by looking closely at Raine's methods. Choices of language and imagery were often well analysed, with some learners also able to discuss Raine's use of rhyme and verse. Very good answers also considered the effects of the choices, noting, for example, how 'the lack of rhyme on "desire" in line 12 emphasizes this word, linking it back to the opening line, and thus highlighting how the speaker's mood has changed', as one response argued. Personification, enjambment, caesura and Raine's use of dialogue were often similarly analysed and discussed. Where the analysis was supported by precise references to the poem and some awareness of relevant contexts, the answers always did very well.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

<p>Paper 9695/13 Drama and Poetry</p>

Key messages

- Candidates should consider the terms of the question carefully and identify the main area of discussion before selecting relevant material to address the task.
- Although specific references to other parts of the text are not a requirement in **(b)** questions, the most successful responses are informed by a precise context to the passage, related to the main area of discussion in the question.

General comments

The general standard this session was once again satisfactory with candidates achieving marks in the highest levels on nearly every text on the paper. Rubric errors were rare and almost no candidates appeared to have time problems. All but a very few candidates were able to show at least a basic knowledge of their chosen texts and many learners showed evidence of a real enjoyment and engagement with them.

There are two general issues to address this session:

- (a)** Candidates should have a clear approach in mind for addressing the questions. This should include considering the terms of the task carefully, to establish what is the main focus of the question and deciding on their own general response to point at issue. Many questions offer a challenge or proposition on a key area of the text and it is vital, if the candidate is to answer the question relevantly, that this is clearly recognised before the candidate starts to select appropriate material to introduce into the essay. Focusing on the key terms of the task set is an important first step in producing a relevant and focused answer.
- (b)** Passage-based **(b)** questions need detailed focus on the extract printed on the question paper in order to analyse the writing closely. However, knowledge of the rest of the text helps to develop a candidate's argument. When answering a passage-based question candidates will find it helpful to identify the context of the passage early in their answer. This might be what has happened immediately before or is about to happen, or it might be a key moment for a particular character. If the passage is an extract from a longer poem the context would be the wider text. For a complete short poem, the context might be textual or some other appropriate information, for example biographical or historical.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Drama

Question 1

THOMAS MIDDLETON and WILLIAM ROWLEY: *The Changeling*

This was the least popular text on the paper with only a few responses overall.

- (a)** Most answers were able to select relevant material from the text with which to address the task. Weaker answers tended to discuss sex within a relationship on a character-by-character basis, with De Flores and Beatrice always the main focus, but at times appropriately contrasted to Isabella and her would-be lovers in the sub-plot. Better answers at this level focused more on the attitudes of the characters, identifying 'the destructive lust that de Flores has for Beatrice is mirrored by her

understated yet evidently sexual response on first seeing Alsemero', as one suggested. The 'madness' of Antonio and Franciscus also was derived from sexual desire', as another essay suggested. More competent answers explored the gender differences, noting the 'lustiness of the men, such as Alibius and De Flores in contrast to the purity of Isabella and, to start with, Beatrice', as one essay put it. Other answers remembered Diaphanta's reaction to her night with Alsemero and the 'high price she had to pay for her enjoyment', as one noted. Some essays also contrasted Alsemero to Beatrice with his untainted, almost religious, reaction on first seeing Beatrice. Age-related interpretations were also seen: the age differences of the women to their suitors and lovers, for example. Good answers addressed the presentation of the different attitudes more directly, noting the various contrasts and parallels but also considering language. The 'virginity' test administered to Diaphanta and then to Beatrice was often discussed, as a 'symbol of male attitudes to female sexuality', as one stated. Very good analyses were seen of some of the dramatic methods. For example, De Flores's 'sexually charged but somehow repulsive groping of Beatrice's cast-off gloves', with very good answers exploring the nuances of the language and the imagery. Other answers noted 'the destructiveness of sex in terms of characters like Beatrice, her defenceless, pitiful first encounter with De Flores in stark contrast to her abandonment at the end', as one noted. Where such answers were supported by references to the text, with some awareness of appropriate contexts, they did very well.

- (b) Nearly every response was able to place this passage near the end of the play, as Alsemero 'realises the truth about his wicked wife', as one explained. Weaker answers summarised the situation in the passage but were distracted into retelling the plot up to this point in the play, often in great detail. Better answers at this level focused on the three characters, offering personal responses to them, with many sympathetic to Alsemero's situation and 'appalled by Beatrice's capacity for deceit even at the end', as one learner said. More competent answers considered the dramatists' characterisation, with some finding 'her desire to appear chaste, yet admitting to murder, an odd reversal of what a modern audience would expect'. Her attempts to distance herself from De Flores and justify her actions were seen as either surprising or typical, with some contrasting Alsemero's shocked response to De Flores's honesty and acceptance of their fate. Good answers explored the language, and its effects on the audience, the imagery of death and violence and the pace of the action, all of which, 'build up the tension as the play moves to its bloody climax', as one learner noted. Others noted how the dramatists contrast the 'responses of the villainous couple' through dramatic irony – 'she would commend me to the gallows', for example. Very good answers were alive to the nuances of the methods and their effects, noting for example how 'Alsemero's responses reinstate true morality into the audience that has been sucked into empathising with murderous adulterers', as one response expressed it. Dramatic action was well explored at this level, with the entrance of De Flores often seen as a 'particularly tense moment, with audience's fearing for Alsemero', though as some noted 'unlike Beatrice, he remains true to himself and his love for her, even as she rejects him'. At this level of engagement there was some excellent analysis of language seen, for example, how 'De Flores's use of rhyme serves to accentuate the impact of the word "whore"', and the 'clarity of Alsemero's judgement in suggesting Beatrice is De Flores's "prey"'. Answers at this level supported points with precise quotation from the passage and confident reference to the wider text, whilst shaping their arguments to the demands of the question.

Question 2

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Measure for Measure*

This was a popular choice of text, with a majority choosing the passage (b) option.

- (a) This was a popular choice, with every answer having a personal response to Angelo and many finding some relevant support for their views from the text. Weaker answers retold Angelo's story in their own words, with little or no attention paid to the given quotation. Better answers at this level were able to shape the response to contrast 'Angelo at the start, stern and moral, with Angelo at the end, corrupt and broken', as one essay put it. Most responses at this level discussed his 'moral decline, that ultimately leads to his desire for death', as one essay suggested. More competent answers saw the contrasts between 'Angelo and the "dead" Claudio, who have had sex with their betrothed', though others thought the 'bed-trick, leading to his eventual marriage to Mariana, was also morally suspect', as one said, 'and suggestive of the deep-rooted moral corruption that still lurks in Vienna at the end of the play'. Good answers focused more on Shakespeare's presentation, tracing the progress in how Angelo is described, often in opposites: untried/experienced, sincere/hypocrite, 'snow-broth' blood/sensual race, for example, were all

explored fruitfully. Other good answers noted how Shakespeare contrasts what others say about him with his own words, with some noting his own 'bemusement with his apparent need to corrupt the purity of the religious Isabella.' Very good answers focused on the dramatic methods in detail, exploring the various contrasts, such as Angelo with Claudio or with the Duke, the language and imagery used by others and Angelo himself in describing his actions and state of mind. Other responses argued for the importance of his soliloquys to how an audience judges him. Some answers noted how Shakespeare contrasts what the 'audience hears about him with what they see in front of them', as one noted. Nearly all learners agreed with Angelo's quoted view, seeing his original treatment of Mariana, the forced violation of what he thought was a nun, the carried through execution of Claudio and his shameful attempts to cover it all up by his accusations against Isabella, 'all worthy of the death penalty, which Shakespeare outrageously denies his audience', as one argued. Such answers often had very detailed and perceptive knowledge and understanding of the text, as well as appropriate contexts, to support their arguments.

- (b) Successful responses to this question invariably had a clear knowledge and understanding of the textual context, referencing, not only the Duke's disguise as a friar but also key moments such as the preceding conversations with Isabella about the bed-trick, Lucio's attack on the Duke's honesty and morals to the 'friar' and his persuading of Claudio to accept his execution as just. Weaker answers summarised the various plots and the Duke's role in them, often with only general references to the given extract. Better answers at this level did focus more on the passage, often with a paraphrase of the exchanges and a summary of some of the contextual references. Nearly all at this level saw the Duke as 'a crafty schemer, needlessly putting Claudio and Isabella through hell, when he could have simply taken back his position and put an end to it', as one suggested. Other, more competent responses, saw him variously as 'a lying manipulator, ironically dressed as a humble friar', or 'a benevolent ruler trying to right the wrongs of his previous misjudgements', often finding compelling evidence for both points of view in the extract. His disguise was much discussed – 'what enables him to persuade Isabella and Mariana into the dubious bed-trick is here used as a tool to question the workings of justice in his own kingdom', as one learner thought. This 'ambivalence to the Duke is precisely where the "problem" of the play lies', as another wisely suggested. Good answers noted the methods of characterisation – the dramatic irony of his situation, the humour in his questions about the Duke to Escalus, his shrewd comment about Angelo's 'needing to live up to his judgements, even though the Duke knows he is not and would not', and the use of soliloquy to 'let the audience see into his state of mind', as one put it, 'so that his shock about Angelo becomes very obvious'. Very good answers were always aware of the significance of this extract to the play as a whole and to the Duke's characterisation, often seamlessly integrating wider text references into the flow of the argument.

Question 3

WOLE SOYINKA: *The Trials of Brother Jero and Jero's Metamorphosis*

This was not a popular choice of text, with most learners choosing the passage (b) option.

- (a) There were too few responses to this question to be able to make a general comment on performance.
- (b) Answers which had a secure knowledge of the context for this passage were able to explore the dynamics in the relationship with some confidence. Weaker answers, without this knowledge, responded to the relationship as though it were central to the play, often summarising the two characters involved with some accuracy, but unsure as to the overall significance of Ananias. More competent answers recognised this exchange as 'showing the audience at the start of the second play how Jero is gaining power and influence through blackmail', though for others 'Jero is simply smarter and more knowledgeable than his victims'. Others linked the exchange to Soyinka's 'satire of religion in general and the prophets in particular, as two chancers jostle for position', as one learner expressed it. Good answers developed such ideas, noting how 'Jero's superiority and the audience's positive response to him, is created by his domination of such low-life characters'. Other good answers analysed some of the dramatic methods: language, stage directions and stage actions were often discussed, with some considering the effects of 'the contrast between the tall, impeccably dressed Jero and the dirty, strongman physique of the wrestler'. Very good answers tracked the progression of the discussion, identifying how Jero 'gradually but remorselessly takes control of the at first confident Ananias and turns him into his henchman', as one response expressed it, with careful analysis of language and action in support. Very good answers always

had a secure knowledge of the wider text, enabling them to discuss perceptively the significance of this relationship to Jero's characterisation and to the plot as a whole.

Question 4

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

This was the most popular drama text on the paper, though nearly all of the learners chose the passage (b) option.

- (a) There were only a few responses to this question. Weaker answers retold the story of how Big Daddy had made his fortune and how the play focused on 'the rivalry between the brothers to claim the inheritance', as one suggested. Better answers at this level were able to contrast the attitudes of Brick and Gooper, as well as their wives, Maggie and Mae. Most responses thought the 'scheming and planning of Gooper and Mae, even using their children as leverage on Big Daddy, was reprehensible', as one learner put it. Such ideas were at times well contrasted with Brick's apparent indifference to money and Maggie's determination not to become poor again. More competent answers linked these points to Williams's methods of characterisation, noting that 'even the Reverend was callously using Big Daddy's cancer as a way of getting money for his church', as one response mentioned. Others focused on the attitudes to wealth rather than the characters, some learners arguing, for example, that Big Daddy's attitude had 'led to him becoming so dominating in the family', though his previous poverty was often compared to Maggie's, leading some responses to argue that they were very similar in other ways too. Good answers, secure in textual knowledge and understanding, connected the various attitudes to Williams's other concerns, such as mendacity, class and the conflict within family relationships. Very good answers developed their interpretations of characters and concerns by looking closely at Williams's dramatic methods: language, contrasting characters, symbolism and dramatic action were all well analysed in these essays. The arguments too were more sophisticated and complex. For some, money was 'only the catalyst that brought the hidden tensions and rivalries to the fore', as one learner suggested. For others, 'Big Daddy's cancer was destroying him just as his vast wealth was destroying his family', as one expressed it. The different attitudes to wealth 'simply reflected the personalities of the characters on stage, Brick's cool indifference contrasted with Gooper's driven need for recognition, Maggie's terror of poverty contrasted with Mae's desire for status and Big Daddy's bullying and abuse linked to Big Mama's indecision and devotion', as one succinctly summarised it. Many of these essays were able to range widely in the text, supporting their points with precise references and a secure awareness of contexts.
- (b) This was the second most popular question on the paper and nearly every response had relevant opinions about Brick, Maggie and their relationship on which to base their essay. Weaker answers tended to respond in a general way to the passage, using it as platform from which to share their, often detailed, knowledge of the play generally. Better answers at this level kept the focus on Maggie and Brick and linked their personal response to the passage directly. Maggie's attitude to children was a popular discussion point. 'The way she describes her nephews and nieces does not suggest that she would make a good mother', suggested one learner, though for others 'her understanding of what Gooper and Mae are up to shows how smart she is'. More competent responses noted how one-sided the discussion is, with 'Maggie using the threat of Gooper cutting Brick out of the inheritance as a means of getting Brick's attention', as one response noted. The way she revealed Big Daddy's cancer and Brick's response to it was often discussed – 'her matter of fact tone jars with the only time he shows any interest in her monologue', as one learner put it. Good answers looked carefully at Williams's dramatic methods. Her 'Southern drawl, and constant chatter giving a misleading easy going image of the couple, which his indifference at this point supports', as one essay remarked. Language, stage directions and dramatic actions were often well analysed at this level, revealing for some 'Maggie's obsession with her looks and Brick's lack of interest in her'. Others noted important details such as Brick responding 'sharply', Maggie drawing the blinds 'to keep out the revealing light' and the background noises intruding into the bedroom. The setting was a fruitful point of analysis at this level – 'the casual conversation of a dysfunctional couple in an intimate setting, touching on many of the serious issues of the family and the play', as one learner suggested. At this level the essays often had a confident grasp of the wider text and were able to support their arguments relevantly and appropriately.

Section B: Poetry

Question 5

SIMON ARMITAGE: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

This was a minority choice of text in **Section B** with most learners choosing the passage **(b)** option.

- (a) There were only a few essays seen on this question. Nearly all learners were able to select relevant material from the text to address the task. Weaker answers often listed what they considered the key symbols and summarised where they appeared in the text. Popular choices were the green girdle, the axe, Sir Bertilak's castle and the Green Knight himself, with most learners able to place them in the context of the tale as a whole and, at least partly, discuss their significance to the poem's meaning. Others explored Armitage's use of colours, usually green and gold, symbolic for some of fertility and wealth respectively. More competent answers considered the effects more directly. The green girdle, for example, was for some a symbol of 'Gawain's lack of honesty and true chivalry', as one noted, though others saw it as 'symbolic of his humanity in a world of magic and deceit'. Other sound answers noted the conflict between the pagan symbolism of the pentangle and the 'constant references to Christian symbolism such as the cross and the churches', as one noted. Good answers were able to develop their analysis of the effects with secure understanding of the contexts behind some of the symbols – the pentangle was often thoroughly dissected and explored, for example. Other good answers argued that 'pretty much everything in the poem is symbolic, from the beheading in Arthur's court to the slight wound given to Sir Gawain at the end', as one learner suggested, with convincing arguments seen on the centrality of 'the pagan myth of death and rebirth symbolised in the Christmas tide setting for the two acts of violence', as one put it. Good answers were always able to support their arguments with precise references to the text and an assured understanding of the poem and its contexts.
- (b) This was the more popular choice on this text. Learners who had a sound knowledge of the text and were thus able to place the passage in its context were at a great advantage. Some weaker responses were unsure about the relationship here, wondering 'why the knight is rejecting his lover', as one essay put it. Better answers at this level did know the background to the lady's attempted seduction and were able to at least in part consider the significance of the passage to the poem as a whole. More competent answers recognised this exchange as a 'a test of Sir Gawain's chivalry and chastity', whilst others thought it 'a key moment in the development of the beheading game as the knight's worthiness is challenged by inevitably a woman', as one learner argued. Good answers followed the battle of wits in detail, noting the Lady's seductive language and Sir Gawain's studied politeness. The setting of his bed chamber was explored fruitfully, with some good answers contrasting the hunting scenes for 'Sir Gawain is as much the prey of the wife as the boar is of the husband', as one succinctly put it. Good answers developed the analysis of the language of love and chivalry in detail, with good understanding of the wager with the host and of Sir Gawain's situation. The few responses who were able to explore Armitage's alliterative verse with understanding often did well, though very few considered other poetic methods such as rhythm and tone with any confidence.

Question 6

ROBERT BROWNING: Selected Poems

This was a popular choice of text in **Section B**, with the majority of learners tackling the passage **(b)** option.

- (a) Nearly every learner was able to select relevant poems with which to address the task, the most popular choices being *The Laboratory*, *My Last Duchess*, *The Confessional* and *Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister*, though a few very weak responses did use the poem from the **(b)** passage question, suggesting a limited knowledge of the text and inevitably restricting the success of the response. Most essays saw anger as presented through the characters, with weaker answers telling the stories of the Duke, the scorned lover and the jealous monk, often in detail, but staying at a narrative level of response. Better answers at this level were partly able to discriminate between the types of anger, 'the righteous anger of the betrayed speaker in *The Confessional* is more positive than the pettiness of the speaker in *the Spanish Cloister*', as one noted. Better answers noted how anger was often 'against or within the church', reflecting Browning's attitudes to organised religion. Other answers saw anger as 'an emotional response to a perceived betrayal by a lover or a partner', as one learner said. Competent answers explored Browning's methods of

presentation: dramatic monologue was a popular discussion point, as were Browning's choices of language and imagery, such as references to 'poison in *The Laboratory* and status in *My Last Duchess*, which reveal the true state of mind of the speakers', as one learner argued. Few answers were able to explore Browning's poetic methods more generally, so that little mention was made of the use of rhyme and rhythm, for example. However good essays did show confident development of the arguments and secure knowledge and understanding through detailed references to the text, with some supported by appropriate contexts as well. These essays invariably did well.

- (b) This was the most popular choice of question in **Section B**. Weaker answers sometimes had a lack of knowledge of the details of the poem, suggesting the extract was being discussed as an unseen. This inevitably limited the success of any interpretation offered, which were often speculative in their view of the relationship. More capable responses did have knowledge of the poem and, at times, understanding enough to discuss some the relationship relevantly. Many learners attempted a running commentary, going chronologically through the poem. This was more successful where the essay offered an overview of its meaning in the introduction. Some essay, using this approach, mismanaged the time so that the final verse was only briefly considered. Competent answers were alive to the shifting moods of the speaker, and where this was supported by awareness of Browning's choices of language and imagery, the answers did well. At this level the narrative voice was often analysed, 'as a disappointed male, though in this case neither violent nor jealous', as one learner remarked. Good answers were more wide ranging in their consideration of the poetic methods, noting 'how the language reflects the lover's shifting moods', or 'Browning's use of enjambement mirrors the speaker's flowing fantasy about this last ride', as one learner suggested. Other successful answers noted the use of interior dialogue, reported speech and the shifting tenses of the verbs to good effect. Very good answers offered more developed readings of the poem. For example, how 'Browning mixes the emotional and the physical through the metaphor of the ride', while others at this level explored his use of the natural world 'to create a positive setting for a poem about disappointed love', as one learner argued. Where such arguments combined a thorough knowledge and understanding of the poem, with perceptive analysis, shaped to the question and supported by well-selected contextual details, they were always very successful.

Question 7

GILLIAN CLARKE: Selected Poems

This was a minority choice overall, with the vast majority of learners choosing the (b) passage option.

- (a) There were too few responses to this question to be able to make a general comment on performance.
- (b) Weaker answers sometimes had very limited knowledge and understanding of the poem, suggesting the extract was being discussed as an unseen. This inevitably limited the success of any interpretations offered, which were often speculative in their view of the events, such as the speaker having wounded her child with the scythe, and there were some misunderstandings as to what a scythe is. Basic answers were able to outline the situation, noting that this 'is a regular, normal activity, gardening, but leads to high emotions', as one learner summarised it. Better answers at this level noted Clarke's typical concern of 'humans and nature and how they affect it badly', according to one. More competent answers developed from the surface events into more metaphorical interpretations. 'Was this the speaker's guilt over childbirth and its traumas, as seen in *Catrin*', one wondered and for others the crushing of the warbler's egg was symbolic of the 'thoughtless way humans damage a vulnerable environment'. Some responses at this level did get distracted into interesting yet ultimately irrelevant personal responses on climate change and current environmental issues. Good answers stayed focused on the given poem and explored Clarke's poetic methods in depth, with some perceptive analysis seen of the language and the imagery, as well as personification, particularly of the scythe, and the anthropomorphism of the warbler. Very good answers considered the effects of Clarke's choices. Many noticed the use of the present tense, 'which gives an immediacy to the narrative and draws the reader into the middle of it', as one learner suggested. Other answers explored stanza form, line length, Clarke's use of free verse (sometimes erroneously referred to as 'blank verse') and internal rhymes, all of which were at times well analysed. Where these analyses were fully integrated into the learner's interpretation of the poem the essays did very well indeed.

Question 8

Songs of Ourselves, Volume 2

This was a minority choice overall, with the vast majority of learners choosing the **(b)** passage option.

- (a)** There were too few responses to this question to be able to make a general comment on performance.
- (b)** Nearly every learner had at least a basic knowledge and understanding of the poem, with those who were aware of the context of Hardy's biography at an advantage in understanding the speaker's feelings. Some weaker answers attempted a chronological discussion, going through the poem line by line, though without an introductory summary of the poem's overall meaning, such an approach was often piecemeal and disjointed. More competent answers were able to trace the progress of the speaker's feeling 'from desolation to a kind of acceptance that there might be hope', as one learner summarised it. For many responses this was reflected in nature, as 'the poem shifts from desolate winter to the springlike joy of the thrush', as one essay expressed it. Good answers explored the details – noting for example the 'aged thrush mirroring the speaker', or 'evensong, carolings and blessed suggesting a religious hope for the speaker', or 'how the dreary winter scene mirrors the speaker's loneliness'. Good analysis of the effects of the rhymes were seen and in very good answers some awareness of the rhythm of the poem, 'surprisingly light and almost jaunty', as one noted 'given the topic of the poem'. Many answers discussed Hardy's use of pathetic fallacy, often with some perception, and other good answers considered the 'effects of some of the archaic diction such as haunted, coppice and illimited', which 'suggests how long the speaker has been grieving'. Very good answers always supported their points with close reference to the poem and integrated appropriate contextual points into their arguments seamlessly.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/21
Prose and Unseen

Key messages

- Successful responses focus closely on the writing of the texts and how the writer presents the meaning and content to the reader.
- Responses which rely on summary of the set texts or unseen extracts are not successful.
- Successful responses use analysis of specific references and quotations to support their point. This should be particularly remembered for the **(a)** questions, where candidates select their own references to answer the question.
- Successful responses to **(b)** passage questions focus securely on analysis of the writing in the selected extract in great detail.
- While specific references to other parts of the text are not required in **(b)** passage questions, knowledge of the rest of the text usually informs successful responses.
- In **Section B: Unseen**, successful responses show how the literary features of the text type communicate the meaning and contribute to the reader's understanding of the passage or poem.
- Candidates should carefully read though the Unseen text in order to be confident with its meaning before beginning to write the answer to the question.

General comments

All the set texts and Unseen texts elicited responses, each one stimulating some interesting and thoughtful discussion. While most candidates showed knowledge of the texts, it was apparent that a number addressed the **(b)** passage questions on the set texts as unseen material, with no knowledge of the wider text. This often led to significant errors of understanding and responses were invariably weak. On the other hand, Examiners read many focused discussions of ways in which writers communicate their concerns through their choices of language, form and structure. Candidates who maintained a firm focus on the writing of the texts, responding to specific question prompts such as 'presentation' and 'ways in which', were the most successful. Teachers and candidates should remember that candidates need to be very confident with their knowledge of texts in **(a)** questions. They need to support their argument with analysis of specific episodes from the texts to support their answers. The passage-based **(b)** questions need detailed focus on the extract printed on the question paper in order to analyse the writing closely, though knowledge of the rest of the text is always useful to develop points. Teaching for the Unseen section should introduce candidates to a wide range of writing so that they have a good grounding in the key features and conventions of poetry, prose and drama texts.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Prose

Question 1

IAN McEWAN: *Atonement*

- (a)** Most candidates responded enthusiastically to the question on McEwan's presentation of the effects of telling lies, recognising this as one of the novel's core concerns. Less confident responses restricted themselves to Briony's accusation that Robbie is Lola's assailant and treated this in narrative fashion, summarising some of the key events. More successful answers looked at the motivation for Briony's lie and the social structures which allow it to be accepted, then considered the ramifications of the deceit, including Robbie's imprisonment and wartime experiences, the rupture of his relationship with Cecilia and Briony's ultimate realisation of her guilt. Strong essays considered McEwan's structuring of the plot and control of characterisation,

exploring how much of the novel radiates from the centre of Briony's lie. Effective answers also moved beyond Briony, considering McEwan's presentation of Paul Marshall and his suave manipulation of the police and the lie of his silence. Other deceits were also considered in thoughtful answers, like Lola's lies about her scratches before the assault and her silence after it, the lie at the centre of Emily and Jack Tallis' marriage and the old-world sham of the Tallis house with its 'folly' in the grounds. A number of candidates considered the title of the novel, considering the way in which McEwan shapes the text around Briony's attempt to remedy the lie she told through her novel, revealing the truth about Lola's assault. A few sophisticated responses took this further, considering the lies within the novel, like the happy ending that Briony creates for Cecilia and Robbie and her unreliability as a narrator, creating a flaw in her atonement. A very few candidates went further still, considering the nature of fiction itself, explored by McEwan using metafictional techniques, specifically the late revelation that Robbie and Cecilia died during the war. This makes readers acutely aware of the 'lie' of the novel and thus raises questions about fiction, narration and writers themselves.

- (b) A surprising number of candidates attempted this question with no knowledge of the wider text, which therefore missed the key implications of the passage. There were also several essays which paraphrased the extract with little comment on McEwan's writing and presentation of Briony. Others misread the extract, believing that the passage itself demonstrates Briony's journey from diagnosis to full dementia in the course of its 35 lines. Successful answers were able to draw comparisons between the Briony of earlier in the novel and the older version the reader meets in this final section. Candidates recognised a similar hankering for control, and that Briony's diagnosis is particularly painful for a writer, emphasised by her comments about 'the disappearance of single words – simple nouns might be the first to go – then language itself'. Answers which focused on the writing of the excerpt noticed the sudden change of tone and tense in this part of the novel and the ambiguities of Briony's response to the diagnosis. Such discussion combined her awareness of the future and careful listing of the effects of dementia with the mocking of the 'dim old biddy' image and the apparently cheerful phrase 'Bon voyage!' Subtle readings noticed the 'not at first' after 'I was not distressed' and suggested that the 'Bon voyage!' is self-shielding bravado. They also noted the fear of madness, the admission that 'I couldn't really believe it' and the pathos of 'fading into unknowing.' As well as some close attention to language and sentence structure, several answers noted that McEwan uses this section of the novel to reveal Briony as the 'author' of the book and to reveal the trick that has been played on the reader. This was a useful context for discussion of the passage and its style. It led to some vigorous personal responses to Briony here, which varied considerably. Some argued that that passage creates a final sympathy for Briony, a writer who is losing her grasp of language and reality, achieving an ironic atonement. Others suggested that McEwan shows that she has not changed, still presenting herself as the centre of attention, phoning her friends with her exacting 'news' and taking satisfaction in their devastation. Some perceptive candidates noted that her 'Let me not be mad' is a borrowing from *King Lear* and suggests that she sees herself as a tragic hero.

Question 2

NGŪGĪ WA THIONG'O: *Petals of Blood*

- (a) There were few responses to this question, but these recognised that Ngũgĩ's novel suggests that there is very little legal justice and that the legal systems are loaded against ordinary Kenyans. The corruption exemplified by characters such as Kimeria demonstrate this, while the villagers of Ilmarog suffer the injustices. Some answers focused on the trial of the villagers in the city as an isolated example of legal justice working as it should, led by the lawyer, who was often seen as Ngũgĩ's sole example of a truly just legal representative, working on behalf of the people. A few noted that his assassination suggests the death of real justice in Kenya.
- (b) There were some limited responses to this question, often confusing Abdulla and Kimeria, but most essays focused appropriately on Abdulla, noting the initial tension of the scene with Kimeria in the bar and then the sudden action of his response to the fire at Wanja's place. The strongest answers demonstrated ways in which Ngũgĩ changes the mood of the passage through sentence structure, which, for example, highlights the '– a small pistol –' in the first paragraph to create the sense of danger. This is dissipated as Abdulla 'hobbled out slowly' at the beginning of the second paragraph, with the sequence of short observational sentences in ll.16–25. Candidates with strong textual knowledge recognised that this is undercut by Abdulla's intentions. Another shift is marked by the questions which begin paragraph 3, creating surprise and action. Successful candidates often commented on the reminders of Abdulla's heroic Mau Mau past in the references to 'the

forests of Longonot and Mount Kenya' and his return to heroic action, even though his disability means he 'hobble-hobbled'. A very few candidates commented on how this compound verb has an auditory effect to emphasise the difficulty of his movement. Some confident candidates commented on the irony of Abdulla's sudden manifestation as a saviour, when his intentions were initially destructive. They noted the shift from the challenge to Kimeria at the beginning of the passage to Abdulla's rescue mission, where he pulls a body which 'could even be Kimeria' from the fire.

Question 3

Stories of Ourselves Volume 2

- (a) A small number of candidates attempted the question on the presentation of characters' hopes. Popular stories used were *The Black Ball*, *An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge*, *The Plantation*, *The Melancholy Hussar of the German Legion* and *Haywards Heath*. Several answers were marked by simple narration and accounts of the hope of the characters, and these were limited in their success. More confident answers considered writing and structure, which was particularly successful with *An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge* and its final revelation that the hoped-for escape has been a pre-death hallucination, or the way in which Adagha includes a number of proleptic clues that the hope for an escape from poverty will be catastrophically prevented in *The Plantation*. The melancholy ironies and the ending of both Attila's hopes in *Haywards Heath* and Phyllis' in *The Melancholy Hussar* were explored successfully.
- (b) Far more candidates chose to respond to the question on *The Paper Menagerie*, often very successfully. The successful responses showed evidence of knowledge of the whole story and were able to put the passage in its context, making comments on the narrator's changing attitude and relationship with his mother and his culture, as candidates engaged with the interaction between the boys. Most provided detailed analysis of the interaction, appreciating the wider context and issues of culture, race and class. There was interesting analysis of ways in which Liu contrasts the toys and how they represented the different cultures, with comments on popular culture, materialism, tradition, skilled art and imagination. Candidates who paid close attention to the language and structure of the dialogue were able to construct thoughtful lines of argument about the challenges between the boys, the level of competition and the effects of Mark's crude dismissal of both Laohu and Jack's mother. They were alert to how the italicised 'trash' emphasises how Jack is suddenly made to reevaluate his menagerie, while the actions of the animals in the passage demonstrates Liu's use of magic realism. Essays featured some thoughtful discussion of ways in which Laohu represents Jack as well as his mother's Chinese culture, so that the tiger's destruction at Mark's hands represents both the collapse of Jack's confidence and his respect for his mother and her culture. While many candidates were ready to condemn Mark's words and behaviour, some noted too that Jack begins the challenge by questioning whether the Obi-wan model can 'do anything else'. Others noted that the narrative perspective, however, is aligned with Jack, and that the Star Wars toy is presented as dull and limited, with 'a tinny voice' and only able to 'swing his arms', which it does 'five times'. This is very different from Laohu, who is presented with verbs like 'strode up', 'purred', 'pounced', 'growled' and 'leapt', all energetic and truly lifelike.

Question 4

MARK TWAIN: *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

- (a) There were few responses to this question, and those which discussed a general range of characters without discrimination were not successful. More confident candidates focused on characters who Huck meets in towns on his travels down the river with Jim. These included the numerous townspeople who fall victim to the tricks and deceptions of the duke and the king and those who encourage Boggs and are then shamed by Colonel Sherburn. Candidates commented that Twain's presentation of such characters suggests that the general population is both gullible and cowardly, with Huck's narrative voice separating him from them and presenting him as wiser and more thoughtful. Some commented on Judith Loftus, the woman who sees through Huck's disguise, as an exception to this rule, as well as the crowd who eventually drive the duke and king out of town. Other candidates discussed the absurd ironies of the Shepherdson and Grangerford feud, and some looked at the Wilks sisters as rare examples of trusting generosity.
- (b) Responses to this question varied considerably. Much less successful were those which gave a narrative account of the novel, describing Huck's freedom gained with his journey on the Mississippi river without closely examining the writing of the passage. A large number of

candidates also wrote about the passage in quite a general way, losing focus on the required element on 'life aboard the raft'. Confident responses were aware of Twain's use of the raft as a plot device, moving the characters through different locations and experiences to give a broad picture of American society. They noted the importance of the first paragraph of the extract, with its details of careful construction to make the raft safe and comfortable. Thoughtful responses were alert to the fact that this relies on Jim's skills, who completes the initial work before the pronouns change to 'we', subtly showing first a dependence on Jim and then a mutual enterprise. This often led to sensitive discussion of Jim's role as a surrogate father (compared with Pa at the end of the extract) and the idea that this companionship would have challenged the social conventions of the time, a symbol of unity in a time period where such things would have been forbidden. Examiners also saw some thoughtful discussion of ways in which Twain presents the peace and relaxation of life on the raft, with the list of leisure activities and Huck's description of it as 'solemn' as they lay 'looking up at the stars'. The phrase 'nothing ever happened' presents a rare kind of peace for both characters. However, the visits to the shore, some candidates noted, shows that Huck and Jim are not self-sufficient on the raft and some contact with society is necessary. Some subtle answers were aware that this illustrates the limitations to Jim's freedom – he is restricted to staying on the raft, still unable to go ashore in slave states. There were also some interesting comments on Huck's sense of wonderment at the bright lights of St Louis, 'like the whole world lit up', with the awareness that the city only looks attractive at night time and from a distance – the reality of such towns and cities is very different. Some candidates commented that life on the raft is presented as one of freedom with its own values of trust and contentment, the complete opposite of 'civilized' life on land.

Section B: Unseen

Question 5 – Poetry

Slightly more candidates opted for the poem for the Unseen option and there were some very successful answers. The strongest began with a clear overview to direct their discussion, such as 'The meaning of the poem is that time and nature are in an infinite cycle that will outlast humanity'. The poem repaid careful reading and those who looked carefully at the development of ideas through the stanzas were much more successful than those who developed interpretation from particular images or words without examining their context in the poem. Those who argued that the four stanzas represent the four seasons for example, could not fully support this, and the political readings resting on the single word 'corruption', or that the reference to a 'rose' means that the poem is about the destruction of relationships, could not be sustained. Many assumed the entire poem to be metaphorical, rather than deriving metaphorical implications from a literal starting point. This meant that a number of candidates missed that the poem does start with a depiction of an actual fire, rather than a metaphor for the colours of seasonal falling leaves. Among the answers which acknowledged the fire, there were many interesting ecological readings which argued that the poem is about climate change and human destruction of the natural environment. These were dependent on reading the fire as a wild fire rather than an autumnal garden fire. Those answers which focused on the presentation of time, as required by the question, picked up the focus on the present moment in 'now is the time' at the beginning of the first and third stanzas, with comments on the feeling of ritual. Such responses went on to acknowledge the destruction of the vestiges of the past in the first stanza as the 'brittle and blotched' leaves are burned. The completeness of this destruction is emphasised, strong candidates argued, by the repetition of 'all' at the beginning of ll. 8 – 10 and the references to 'ghost' and 'expire', suggesting death. Confident answers noted a shift in tone in stanza 3 as the speaker moves from the physical to the spiritual, drawing a parallel between the outer natural world and the speaker's human world. Most candidates recognised the major change in the final stanza as the poem shifts from the present concern with the loss of the past to a consideration of the future, which breaks the parallel between nature and humanity that stanza three established. Many candidates commented that this shift to the future also changes the mood to optimism, where 'the leaf and the flower' will 'arise' and 'come again' to new 'glory'. More perceptive responses noted that this optimism and renewal only applies to the natural world, which benefits from seasonal renewal, whereas human death is final and permanent. The optimistic view of 'the certain spring' will not apply to humanity, as nature 'cares for her own ruins, naught for ours.' Candidates who reached this conclusion at the end of their essays after starting with that clear overview had shaped a sophisticated argument.

Question 6 – Drama

While slightly fewer candidates opted for the drama passage, those who chose it tended to respond with energy and understanding, showing evident personal response to the argument between Angelo and Una. More effective responses were those which treated the passage specifically as drama, considering the interactions between the characters, the indications of tone of voice, the dominance of Angelo's dialogue, the

effects of short sentences, repetitions and questions, and the effects of the two stage directions. Most candidates recognised that Stephen, Una's prospective husband, is at the heart of the argument, and is characterised on the one hand as someone who 'adores' and 'worships' Una, and on the other as a 'pious wimp' who lacks love and 'tender' feelings. Starting with the hyperbole of those two verbs 'adores' and 'worships', many responses suggested that Una is trying to persuade herself as well as Angelo and that the dialogue develops her unease at the unsatisfying relationship with Stephen. Supporting this, there were comments on her weak repetitive assertion 'Places. Plenty of places.' in response to Angelo's challenge, and the reduction in her dialogue until the quite desperate 'Stop it. Stop it.' which ends the extract. Many noted that the stage direction '[*Breaks down.*]' indicates her emotional distress and recognition of Angelo's points. There was a range of interesting interpretations of Angelo. A few saw him as a disinterested friend advising Una (some thought that Angelo was female), while others saw him as mischievous or worse, an ironic reversal of the angelic suggestions of his name. Most, though, argued that his ulterior motive is his own affection for Una, betrayed in his speech about the ideal lover as someone who can 'understand how you feel – to be tender – and affectionate'. Many, whatever the interpretation of his motives, saw something of the bully or the barrack room lawyer in his repeated short aggressive questions in ll. 3–4, 14 and 18–19. Perceptive candidates recognised the humour within the emotions of the passage, particularly the risqué suggestion that Stephen would rather feel 'the flank of a prize Charolais' than be intimate with Una, and his comparison between the 'pious wimp' he believes Stephen to be and his portrait of someone who would love Una 'with all the razzamatazz of his body' – perhaps himself. To counterpoint this humour, there were also sharp comments on Una's short line 'You are evil.', given emphasis straight after the '[*Pause.*]', and the cruelty of Angelo's final image of Una as someone who will 'wither' and become 'a dry brittle stick.' Examiners certainly saw a number of responses which offered little beyond summary, but many essays demonstrated a lively and thoughtful response to this excerpt from a play.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/22
Prose and Unseen

Key messages

- Successful responses focus closely on the writing of the texts and how the writer presents the meaning and content to the reader.
- Responses which rely on summary of the set texts or unseen extracts are not successful.
- Successful responses use analysis of specific references and quotations to support their point. This should be particularly remembered for the **(a)** questions, where candidates select their own references to answer the question.
- Successful responses to **(b)** passage questions focus securely on analysis of the writing in the selected extract in great detail.
- While specific references to other parts of the text are not required in **(b)** passage questions, knowledge of the rest of the text usually informs successful responses.
- In **Section B: Unseen**, successful responses show how the literary features of the text type communicate the meaning and contribute to the reader's understanding of the passage or poem.
- Candidates should carefully read though the Unseen text in order to be confident with its meaning before beginning to write the answer to the question.

General comments

All the set texts and Unseen texts elicited responses, each one stimulating some interesting and thoughtful discussion. While most candidates showed knowledge of the texts, it was apparent that a number addressed the **(b)** passage questions on the set texts as unseen material, with no knowledge of the wider text. This often led to significant errors of understanding and responses were invariably weak. On the other hand, Examiners read many focused discussions of ways in which writers communicate their concerns through their choices of language, form and structure. Candidates who maintained a firm focus on the writing of the texts, responding to specific question prompts such as 'presentation' and 'ways in which', were the most successful. Teachers and candidates should remember that candidates need to be very confident with their knowledge of texts in **(a)** questions. They need to support their argument with analysis of specific episodes from the texts to support their answers. The passage-based **(b)** questions need detailed focus on the extract printed on the question paper in order to analyse the writing closely, though knowledge of the rest of the text is always useful to develop points. Teaching for the Unseen section should introduce candidates to a wide range of writing so that they have a good grounding in the key features and conventions of poetry, prose and drama texts.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Prose

Question 1

IAN McEWAN: *Atonement*

- (a)** The main weakness in less successful responses to this question was a reliance on narrative summary, with essays merely giving an account of the initiation and development of the love affair between Cecilia and Robbie. Several of these omitted to mention that the reunion after the war is Briony's fiction. More confident answers focused on key, defining moments in the presentation of the relationship, aware of the class difference as an initial barrier between them. Candidates discussed their separation at university as a result of this difference, but considered McEwan's use of the incident with the broken vase as a moment of revelation between them. There was also discussion of McEwan's use of passionate language in the scene of their love-making in the library.

A number of thoughtful responses showed how the reader's understanding is shaped by the different perspectives on events, so that what Briony perceives as an assault which 'terrified' her sister, is understood by Cecilia and Robbie as sexual passion. Most noted that McEwan presents Cecilia as the only member of the Tallis family who believes in Robbie's innocence when he is arrested, and this separation from the family becomes complete estrangement. Perceptive responses discussed the couple's fleeting meeting in London, the letters exchanged during the war and the reunion afterwards with a clear awareness that this development of the relationship is Briony's invention, retrospectively coloured by the revelation of their deaths during the war in the final section of the novel. A very few candidates went on to discuss the portrayal of romantic stories, whether Briony's or McEwan's.

- (b) Many strong responses to this question began with the opening sentence of the passage, focusing both on its proleptic qualities and the use of the word 'crime'. There were some fascinating explorations of the word, comparing Briony's action and those of Paul Marshall, for example. Many thoughtful answers were aware that not only is the third person narration presented through Briony's perspective, but that she is later revealed to be the narrator. With this in mind, candidates explored her use of language in the passage, considering the ways in which she dramatises her role, and how the description shows her self-absorption. There were, for example, careful comments on the presentation of her imagination's picturing of the drowned twins, prioritising 'how she might describe' them, rather than showing concern about their whereabouts, emphasised by the soft sibilance of the description. There was also interesting discussion of her presentation of herself in the second paragraph as a heroic figure who 'could go on all night, knifing through the silky air'. Her determination in the third paragraph to protect her sister from the 'maniac' also drew comment, as she is already characterising Robbie as a villain 'with a dark, unfulfilled heart'. Candidates who were confident with the context of the passage were able to draw this discussion together to identify the passage as a crucial one within the structure of the novel, as Briony moves towards her false accusation against Robbie. Aware of this, a number of candidates explored the implications of the final sentence of the second paragraph: 'Wasn't writing a kind of soaring, an achievable form of flight, of fancy, of the imagination?' Examiners saw some interesting discussion of McEwan's use of free indirect discourse as a method to draw the reader into a sense of complicity with Briony, though they are also jolted by a word such as a 'maniac', which almost comically presents her childish delusions. Such discussion, blending a close discussion of the writing of the passage with knowledge of the wider text, led to confident and successful work. Less successful responses tended to give a narrative account of the passage, or used it as a springboard for extended discussion of what Briony had just done, what she would do and how she develops through the rest of the novel. It is very important in (b) questions that candidates focus on both the passage and the question.

Question 2

NGŪGĨ WA THIONG'O: *Petals of Blood*

- (a) There were too few responses to this question to make a general comment appropriate.
- (b) There were few responses to this question, but the most successful essays combined a careful discussion of the language used to present the lawyer in the passage with knowledge of his role in the novel. Careful and detailed answers showed awareness of the lawyer presented as talking through his ideas, his train of thought indicated by the challenges of the questions and the ellipses. His metaphor of 'the beast' received attention, representing the capitalist focus on money which drove colonialism and has now been embraced by those ruling independent Kenya. There was some acute discussion of the development of this image with 'the monster' and the use of Christian imagery, like 'shrine', 'priest', 'congregation', 'excommunicated' and 'the chosen few', creating a link between money and religion and suggesting that they are connected in 'greed and accumulation'. This line of imagery reaches its climax in the last two sentences of the passage, which alert candidates noted presents a deeply pessimistic view of postcolonial Kenya. Good answers matched this awareness of the writing with an understanding of the lawyer's role in helping the poor and ordinary citizens, and a few noted his ultimate assassination by the authorities.

Question 3

Stories of Ourselves Volume 2

- (a) In discussing the presentation of characters' disappointments, candidates used such stories as *The Paper Menagerie*, *The Melancholy Hussar of the German Legion*, *The Tower*, *Haywards Heath* and *The Black Ball* among others. Many of these were quite narrative, giving summary accounts of the stories and the characters who are disappointed. More successful essays chose the stories with care and focused on key episodes to discuss structure, characterisation and presentation. For example, there were examples of quite detailed discussion of the description of Caroline's ascent of the Tower of Sacrifice with its rusty broken handrail and how she forces herself onwards to see the view from the top. There were also thoughtful comments on how the disappointment of the view is pushed further with her impulse to jump and then her never-ending descent. Many candidates saw this as emblematic of the inevitable disappointment of attempting to challenge male-dominated society. The coincidences and ironies of Hardy's plot structure were carefully discussed in some thoughtful responses on *The Melancholy Hussar*, while the final revelation of the mother's letter in *The Paper Menagerie* focused the narrator's disappointment in himself and in the realisation of his mother's disappointment.
- (b) Far more candidates opted for the question on Philip K Dick's *Stability*, most focusing on the effectiveness of the passage as the end of the story. While few considered how Benton found the globe and its growing control over him, candidates saw the passage as the climax of the story as Dick finally reveals two alternative dystopias. Some answers were very explicit in a political reading, suggesting Dick is balancing the tyranny of capitalism against the authoritarianism of communism, considering two opposite political systems which control their populations in different ways. Paying close attention to the writing of the passage, some candidates effectively discussed the personification of the globe and its seductive qualities as it persuades Benton into action. The presentation of the rapidity of his actions was noted, as he 'dived', 'leaped' and 'raced', a striking contrast with the 'bewildered' 'pain and horror' of the Members and the Controller. Some commented on the irony of the Controller's title in this situation. The presentation of the 'mist' which rises from the shattered globe received close attention in successful answers, which noticed the change from seductive mystery in the way it is shown to be 'curling over his legs, up to his chest' to the threatening 'swelling crescendo of exultation' and 'steady throbbing of the machinery'. There was some very good discussion of the oppressiveness of the vocabulary from l. 37, such as 'slaves', 'sweating', 'twisting', 'roaring', 'deafened' and 'compelling' as Benton is thrust into the new nightmare world, so strikingly different from the story's opening images of flight. The final few lines drew some thoughtful comments as candidates were often alert to the ironies as the population is forced to work for the machines. In a few cases, there was some deft discussion of typography, with the italicisation of '*might*', suggesting doubt about Benton's bonus, and especially '*his*', with a few candidates observing that while Benton claims possession of the machine, this is deceptive as the machine clearly owns and controls him.

Question 4

MARK TWAIN: *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

- (a) Most candidates in the few responses naturally focused on the relationship between Huck and Jim for an essay on companionship, but some also considered those between Huck and Pa and the duke and the king as alternatives which illustrate the strength of the bond between Huck and Jim. Most answers tended to be general, relying on assertion and narrative summary. Successful responses needed to be based on some detail and specific references in order to discuss not just companionship, but Twain's presentation of companionship.
- (b) There were some interesting and varied discussions of this passage. Some candidates read the episode as a comic one in which Twain dramatises the creativity, imagination and deception of the king and the duke. More successful answers, however, dwelt on the more serious implications of Twain's depiction of these characters at this moment, perceptively arguing that they are used by the writer to challenge dominant slave-era narratives that characterised black people as naturally untrustworthy and immoral, while glorifying white people as inherently good. Focusing on the details of the presentation, the characters' dialogue drew some thoughtful comments as they both aggrandise and reduce themselves. The triple repetition of 'trouble' in the opening speech was noted, for example, along with the collection of adjectives in 'the wanderin', exiled, trampled-on and sufferin'. Candidates also commented on the king's false magnanimity in his speech ll. 20–25,

while the reference to 'plenty grub and an easy life' indicates the advantage they are taking of Huck and Jim. The subservience forced upon Huck and Jim as they 'set to majestyng him' was noted as a key injustice and a sign of the numerous deceptions which the duke and king practise on the people of the various towns they visit on the journey, culminating in the sale of Jim. Several essays commented on the balance between the shock of the fraud and the humour of the passage, with a number of candidates noting Huck's maturity and perception when he confides to the reader that he did not take 'long to make up my mind that these liars warn't no kings nor dukes, at all'. Such essays usually added that Huck is shown to have a good understanding of human nature and is a survivor who knows how to keep the peace: 'If I never learnt nothing else out of pap, I learnt that the best way to get along with his kind of people is to let them have their own way.' In this way Twain characterises Huck as wise and patient, and further highlights the fraudulence of the duke and the king.

Section B: Unseen

Question 5 – Poetry

Over half of the responses answered the question on the Unseen poem. Responding to the question's direction on 'feelings about rejection', most answers explored some of the ways in which the speaker of the poem reacts to unrequited love. Several argued that the histrionic overreaction typified male responses and that the speaker was therefore likely to be male. While most answers identified that the poem is pre-twentieth century, few were familiar with the traditions of courtly love and the idea of a cruel mistress, of which this is a prime example. Successful candidates had read the whole poem carefully and were able to chart the development of the speaker's thoughts, accusing the would-be lover of 'cruelty' because their refusal tortures the speaker. Examiners saw some effective discussion of the expressive language, with 'flame' and 'burn' showing the destructiveness of the speaker's unrequited passion, contrasted with the 'stormy rain' of the refusal combined with the speaker's own 'tears'. Most candidates were able to see the speaker's claims that the 'heat' of their passion is revived by the would-be lover, who makes 'the flame increase', returning the speaker to a state of 'torment' which 'cannot cease'. A small number of perceptive candidates recognised that these central stanzas represent the constant torture which the speaker claims is caused by the would-be lover – alternately dousing and inflaming the speaker's passion. Some candidates struggled with the final stanza, which only makes sense if the previous stanzas have been read and understood carefully – the speaker pleads with the would-be lover to 'withdraw' either the 'flame' or the 'stormy rain' in the cycle of torture – they cannot die of both, a 'double death'. Comments on form varied widely, as some candidates claimed that the poem was free verse, despite its rhythm and rhyming patterns. Other, more successful answers noted the tightness of the form, with each stanza's alternating rhymes in the first four lines, followed by a couplet and a tercet. Some argued that the tight control of form was paradoxical in a poem of apparent uncontrolled passion and pain, others that it showed the speaker's attempt to control himself and maintain rationality. A very few suggested that despite its apparent feeling, the poem is in fact a highly crafted artefact which idealises such feelings, rather than a genuine expression of high emotion.

Question 6 – Prose

There were fewer responses to the prose extract, but most candidates who chose this question engaged thoughtfully with the writing and seemed genuinely to enjoy the passage. Most candidates saw the main event in the extract as the official demolition of buildings in a slum area with the intention of making room for urbanisation, an accurate reading. This allowed them to explore the presentation of the conflict through the narrative perspective, which aligns itself with the slum dwellers protecting their homes on the barricades. There were many examples of thoughtful discussion of the inversion of expectations, with officials presented to be the opposite of the roles expected. For example, candidates commented on the irony of the policeman who threatens to 'crush your children' and the fireman who 'sauntered' by the 'burning barrier and lit a cigarette.' There was also enthusiastic commentary on the personification and zoomorphism of the bulldozer, described first as a 'huge metal dragon' which 'roared' before it is diminished with the description 'more like a squat rhinoceros than a dragon'. Despite its fearsome appearance, 'it had only crossed twenty feet' in 'ten minutes'. Some perceptive candidates noted that, although the situation is a serious one, the sense of danger is lessened because of the comic tone that such descriptions and observations create. There was, though, interesting discussion of the characters for whom the danger is real, with comments on the sense of community created by the inclusion of the 'women, humming gently' and the children as well as the men and the druids. It was noted that all the named characters are defending the area, particularly Freedom and Sunday, the implications of whose names were often discussed. The relationship between the two was discussed, candidates noting the wordless understanding and unity as Sunday 'tried to smile reassuringly', but sees Freedom standing 'without fear' before he 'flashed him a brilliant smile', empowering Sunday to 'trust him.' Observant candidates compared this with the verbs used to depict communication of the

policeman, who ‘barked’ and ‘shouted’ with empty authority. The failure of the bulldozer’s attack on the barrier, conveyed through metaphor and onomatopoeia, was often subject to observant discussion. Candidates also noted that the damage is inflicted on the officials’ own machinery and that the officials themselves are in ‘scattered heaps’. A few thoughtful candidates suggested that although this is a ‘spectacle’ of defeat, it is likely to be a temporary victory for the defenders, noting the fireman’s earlier thought that ‘It would be easier to come back another day when they were not expected.’ There was much in this rich passage to provide opportunities for candidates to engage with the writing and many did so with vigour and insight, gaining much more than those who restricted their essays to a narrative account of the excerpt.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/23
Prose and Unseen

Key messages

- Successful responses focus closely on the writing of the texts and how the writer presents the meaning and content to the reader.
- Responses which rely on summary of the set texts or unseen extracts are not successful.
- Successful responses use analysis of specific references and quotations to support their point. This should be particularly remembered for the **(a)** questions, where candidates select their own references to answer the question.
- Successful responses to **(b)** passage questions focus securely on analysis of the writing in the selected extract in great detail.
- While specific references to other parts of the text are not required in **(b)** passage questions, knowledge of the rest of the text usually informs successful responses.
- In **Section B: Unseen**, successful responses show how the literary features of the text type communicate the meaning and contribute to the reader's understanding of the passage or poem.
- Candidates should carefully read though the Unseen text in order to be confident with its meaning before beginning to write the answer to the question.

General comments

All the set texts and Unseen texts elicited responses, each one stimulating some interesting and thoughtful discussion. While most candidates showed knowledge of the texts, it was apparent that a number addressed the **(b)** passage questions on the set texts as unseen material, with no knowledge of the wider text. This often led to significant errors of understanding and responses were invariably weak. On the other hand, Examiners read many focused discussions of ways in which writers communicate their concerns through their choices of language, form and structure. Candidates who maintained a firm focus on the writing of the texts, responding to specific question prompts such as 'presentation' and 'ways in which', were the most successful. Teachers and candidates should remember that candidates need to be very confident with their knowledge of texts in **(a)** questions. They need to support their argument with analysis of specific episodes from the texts to support their answers. The passage-based **(b)** questions need detailed focus on the extract printed on the question paper in order to analyse the writing closely, though knowledge of the rest of the text is always useful to develop points. Teaching for the Unseen section should introduce candidates to a wide range of writing so that they have a good grounding in the key features and conventions of poetry, prose and drama texts.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Prose

Question 1

IAN McEWAN: *Atonement*

- (a)** Examiners saw a small number of responses to the question on the presentation of mothers. Some of these offered a straightforward summary of Emily Tallis and Grace Turner with simple observations of their roles. More confident responses explored the class difference in their relationship and the assumptions that they therefore have about their children's upbringing. Successful candidates were able to make specific references to key moments in the early part of the novel where Emily is presented as an ineffectual mother despite her pride in her role. They referred to her views on Cecilia's education, her confused preparations for the meal, her migraines and her isolation, which leads to key errors of judgement. Some noted that her one decisive action

is to demand to see the letter from Robbie to Cecilia, which she misinterprets, thus condemning Robbie. Most essays developed the contrast McEwan creates between Emily and Grace, a woman without wealth and without a husband, but one who has absolute faith in her son. Most candidates were able to quote her final outburst 'Liars! Liars! Liars!', with its emphatic repetition, at the end of Part One.

- (b) This was the most popular question on the set texts and elicited a wide range of responses. Most understood the situation described and commented on the soldiers' reluctance to follow the major's lead into a new attack, thus demonstrating his loss of authority. A number of answers noted that Robbie is now referred to as 'Turner', commenting on his military role and arguing that the use of his surname shows that he has been stripped of his individuality and identity following his conviction and his military service. Most candidates recognised that the major is making a ludicrous request, but few focused on the details of his suggestion of using 'cunning and a bit of teamwork' to face Germans who are 'well dug in with a couple of machine guns.' There was usually more success with comments on Turner's sense of powerlessness presented in his feeling the 'horror chill and weaken his legs' and his inability to help, exemplified in his 'empty palms'. Some candidates registered that Turner thinks of the major as a 'fool', but few recognised the satirical stereotype of McEwan's description of his 'little toothbrush moustache' and his breezy language about 'Jerry' and 'flush him out'. Examiners saw few essays which appreciated the humour of the passage. There were some earnest examples of consideration of Mace's language, suggesting either extreme formality or a lack of education in different readings, but very few recognised his subversive mockery of the major. This is apparent not only in the way he ignores the major's refusal of his 'permission to speak' but also in his use of inventive alliteration, and is augmented by Nettle's intervention, claiming that the bogus order is the work of 'Lord Gort', the commander of the British Expeditionary Force. The few responses which explored this humour discussed McEwan's mixture of comedy within the depiction of the horrors of war, further exemplified for those who knew the novel well by the aircraft attack which immediately follows this episode. There were, though, some useful comments on how the passage shows military discipline breaking down and ordinary soldiers disregarding authority as they aim for survival on the road to evacuation at Dunkirk.

Question 2

NGŪGĨ WA THIONG'O: *Petals of Blood*

- (a) There were too few responses to this question to make a general comment appropriate.
- (b) There were very few answers on Ngũgĩ's presentation of Karega and his reaction to Akinyi's news in the passage provided. Some answers focused more on the socio-political context, which is relevant, but they digressed from close focus on and analysis of the writing of the passage. Other responses evaluated the presentation of Karega's thoughts in response to Akinyi's information, considering his characterisation and reactions to her news. Some candidates made observant comments about how Ngũgĩ shows the broken and hesitant processes of Karega's thoughts by multiple use of ellipses and broken phrases. They recognised his hope for a new people's movement in response to the death of 'a very important person in authority' caused by a group aiming for 'one world liberation'. Some also linked the broken phrases to the way the information comes in rumours, rather than facts. In the closing paragraphs of the passage, more could have been said about the repetition of 'new' to exemplify Karega's hopes, and the use of vivid metaphor in his thoughts about capitalism and landlords.

Question 3

Stories of Ourselves Volume 2

- (a) There were too few responses to this question to make a general comment appropriate.
- (b) The question focus of 'changing moods' often steered candidates towards a careful consideration of the structure of the passage and its movement from 'light-headed' optimism to a defeated acceptance of reality at the end. It was a passage and story to which candidates responded with sensitivity, with real appreciation of the changing emotions and ultimate pathos. They often recognised that the phrase 'another turn, Attila?' is key to the changes, appearing at the beginning and end of the passage. Candidates picked out a number of details in the first section, describing the first visit to Rosie, which create optimism, including Attila's 'youthful' feeling, Rosie's 'impish giggle' and Attila's 'urge to kiss' Rosie's hair. The bridge in ll.19–21 continues this, with the

'promise' to return being fulfilled 'two months later'. The 'box of Newbury Fruits' often received careful attention, some candidates arguing that although it is a thoughtful gift, it foreshadows the disappointment to come, reminding readers that after 'forty years' things have changed significantly and are not always 'easy to find' or retrieve. Essays often explored the ending with appreciation of Forna's manipulation of the reader's responses. Good knowledge of the wider story allowed some candidates to note that the careworker with whom Rosie is dancing resembles Attila in his younger days, which prepares for the ending. Many noted as a crux the point where Attila 'heard Rosie say his name' and he looks up with a 'smile... already on his face.' They argued that this is the key point where Forna leads the reader to expect a happy resolution, which is immediately dashed not only by Rosie 'not looking his way', but her use of the key phrase 'Shall we do another turn, Attila?' addressed to the careworker. Though Attila's, and the reader's, disappointment here was noted, only a few candidates broadened their discussion to acknowledge that Rosie's use of the phrase demonstrates the continued presence of Attila in her heart, but the connection is now inaccessible because of her dementia. A very few candidates noted that the careworker's response, 'Whatever makes you happy, Rosie', is the one Attila should have given years ago.

Question 4

MARK TWAIN: *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

- (a) There were very few responses to this question. Those candidates who attempted it tended to summarise some of the cruel behaviour depicted in the novel, such as the feud between the Grangerfords and the Shepherdsons, the altercation between Boggs and Sherburn and the tarring and feathering of the duke and the king. Few broadened this to consider Twain's portrayal of human nature and few focused on the white population's cruelty to black people by enslaving them.
- (b) There was a slightly larger number of responses to this question, though many of these relied on narrative summary rather than analysis of the writing of the passage. A few recognised the irony of Huck's comment 'Jim, you're a free man *again*' when he is legally free anyway. There was some discussion of Tom Sawyer's complex and unnecessary plan for Jim's escape, making him endure it for the boys' own amusement, and a few commented on the heedlessness to danger which the plan involves. Opportunities were often missed to discuss ways in which Twain creates the sense of stealth in the first paragraph, and the pace of the action and aggression during the pursuit in II. 21–35. Very few commented on the final irony that Tom is 'gladdest of all' because he has actually been shot.

Section B: Unseen

Question 5 – Drama

Unusually, the drama extract was much the more popular of the two Unseen options, and many candidates responded to it with enthusiasm and perspicacity. While some responses were narrative in approach, giving a summary of the extract which was not always accurate, more confident essays picked up on Miss Hardcastle's disguise and the advantages it gives her over Marlow. There were also some relevant observations about gender roles, class and unwanted male sexual attention. Some thoughtful candidates observed that while Marlow ought to hold the power in the extract as an upper-class man addressing a female maid, the playwright uses the disguise to revert the power to Miss Hardcastle, who emerges as a far superior and sharper character in the exchange. Marlow's intentions were often well understood, with his guesses at Miss Hardcastle's age accompanied by the stage directions 'approaching' leading to his attempt 'to kiss her'. Many candidates appreciated the author's use of the 'aside', showing awareness of dramatic conventions, and there was appreciation of the irony of his description of Miss Hardcastle as 'a mere awkward, squinting thing', unaware because of the disguise, that he is addressing her. It was pleasing to see candidates appreciate both the physical and verbal drama and the humour of the dramatic irony. Equally, there was some adept discussion of the characterisation of Miss Hardcastle and the way she uses her disguise. Her witty responses were appreciated, like II.12–13, and it was noted that many of her lines are designed to draw Marlow and make him reveal himself further, like her speech II. 17–22 and her questions at I. 28 and II. 35–36. These are used by the dramatist to show her intelligence and control of the scene through the dialogue. There was a strong response amongst candidates to Marlow's attempt to regain control physically at the end of the passage, with him 'seizing her hand' and she 'struggling'. With the innuendo of Marlow wanting to look at her 'embroidery', many candidates argued that at this point the humour stops and Marlow comes close to threatening assault.

Question 6 – Poetry

There were fewer responses to this poem and candidates were seldom confident with a complete understanding. A number of candidates did not seem to have read the whole poem through and arrived at a reading of it before they started writing, and a number picked on a few examples of language or metaphor, taken out of context so that their contribution to the poem's developing meaning was not clear. More careful and successful readings noted the footnote identifying the fado, the dedication to Amalia Roderiguez and the use of the first and second person pronouns in the poem to work out that the poem is the speaker's response to Roderiguez's singing of the fado, addressed directly to the singer. This led to a fuller understanding of the metaphors, describing the complex emotional response to the song in physical terms. Some candidates noted the suggestions of abrasion in the verb 'pumiced' and the sense of entrapment suggested by the reference to a 'net ... of sitar strings'. Some recognised both the pain and the healing created by the 'Queen of night torments', whose song is like 'sutures'. A few candidates were observant of the repeated ambiguities in the imagery, with 'rare stones' balanced by 'the throne of anguish', the 'heavy tread of air' by the 'mothwing', 'severance' by 'eternal'. The repeated urge for freedom in the last two stanzas was noted in some essays, suggesting that the emotions of the song are overwhelming and too powerful for the speaker to bear. When candidates take on a complex text, it is essential that they read it carefully and thoroughly in order to establish their understanding.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

<p>Paper 9695/31 Shakespeare and Drama</p>
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Key messages

- Successful responses to **(b)** passage questions focus securely on analysis of the writing in the selected extract in great detail.
- Candidates should present their ideas within a logical and structured framework.
- Candidates should be reminded of the difference between background information and context.
- It is advisable for candidates to spend an equal amount of time on each question.

General comments

Examiners noted that most of the candidates had plainly enjoyed the texts that they had studied. No matter what their ability, it was clear that candidates had put effort into grappling with these plays and that the majority of them had worked hard to think of the texts as works to be staged, not simply read.

The most successful candidates gave thoughtful expositions of textual detail offered as a means of supporting and developing an argument. These candidates were able to offer a personal view which was relevant to their argument. There was often careful discussion of relevant contexts and a clear indication that critical views, when included, had been considered to deepen or add something to the candidate's own response. At the other end of the spectrum, there were candidates who were able to show knowledge of the plot and action of the plays but were not able to really shape their insight into an overall interpretation of the question. It was noted that many answers did not even mention the author's name. Most of the candidates – of course – fell somewhere in the middle.

At its simplest, **AO1 Knowledge and Understanding** is taken to mean that a candidate can give an account of the central characters and events. To rise upwards through the levels, the criteria require that candidates manipulate what they know in order to answer a particular question. Candidates need to reflect on what the author is actually doing in terms of technique, and to think about the texts strategically in terms of form, structure, language, staging and so on. This involves both being able to identify features and then analyse the significance they create for the text as a whole. A candidate's points need to be substantiated with reference to particular moments in the text, rather than being provided as simple assertions. This is important in **(a)** questions, and essential in **(b)** passage questions.

The most successful candidates plan their writing (not necessarily by writing it down) and are aware of how much they can hope to write in an hour. They are aware that the length of a response does not substitute for quality of insight. Good answers do not always start by announcing a whole argument, or finish in a neat summary of what has been said. The rules for an exam essay are not the same as those that might be applied for a class or homework exercise. In the examination room, candidates have limited time, and are advised to begin their task of responding to the question, with reference to the text, as soon as they can, rather than wasting time attempting to write airy statements of intent or the perfect conclusion. This does not imply that responses do not need a structure. They do. But it does suggest that what has gone before, carefully argued and supported through reference to the text, will speak for itself.

Some successful candidates write at length because they have a lot to say which is of high quality; other candidates write at length because they cannot select material judiciously and often resort to narration of the plot. Such responses are less successful. Candidates should apply the tone and register required for formal literary criticism with consistency.

With **(b)** questions it is sometimes important to position the extract in its larger context in order to make a point about structure, theme or characterisation, whilst avoiding excessive narrative. More generally,

candidates need to be aware that when providing context, it should be *relevant* information (not background about the author) which might be used to inform a reading of the text under consideration. Candidates can interpret 'context' widely, in terms of literary, social and cultural contexts from the time in which the text was written; they can also use the time in which a text might be received. With this paper, therefore, a contemporary production of a Shakespeare play might be explored, noting, for example, that a modern director of *The Merchant of Venice* may take a more sympathetic view of Shylock than a 16th century director might have done. The important point, however, is that any context provided should be integral to a candidate's argument and supported from the detail of the text. Thus, it is perfectly legitimate to talk about Brecht when discussing *An Experiment with an Air Pump* but only if the reference is followed through and a candidate then talks about the effect of alienation that an audience may feel as a result of named and explored dramatic strategies. Simply mentioning Brecht does not contribute to the argument in a successful response. It follows, therefore, that the boundary between context and the view of 'others' can become blurred, such that less successful candidates fail to engage with either context or critics.

A number of candidates wrote at length on one question and then were unable to provide a full second response. No matter how good the first answer is, it can never compensate for a skimmed second response. Even if an answer is going really well, the best advice for a candidate is that after an hour they should turn to the second question, perhaps leaving space to write some more on the first answer if they have time at the end.

Finally, a small matter but one of significance: candidates should ensure that they number their responses correctly.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Shakespeare

Question 1

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *The Merchant of Venice*

- (a) Most candidates identified the dichotomy between modern interpretations and how *The Merchant of Venice* was viewed in its time, which sometimes led to assertion about what Shakespeare thought or intended. In this question, most sympathised with Jessica (female liberation crept in) but some saw her as hard-headed and hard-hearted. A small number of responses – usually amongst the best – paralleled the over-directiveness of Shylock towards his daughter with the relationship between Portia her father, who continues to direct her from beyond the grave. This, of course, often opened out the response to 'the rest of the play,' a requirement of the question. The best answers offered close reference to particular moments, often noting that ducats get mentioned before daughters. The role of Jessica later in the play – when liberated from her father – was largely ignored.
- (b) Candidates were quick to seize the opportunity to compare the relationship between Antonio and Bassanio and Portia and Bassanio. Bassanio was sometimes seen as an unscrupulous gold-digger whose affections lay more with Antonio. More subtle responses tussled with Bassanio's feelings of guilt, his shocked reaction to the reality of Antonio's situation, noting too that Portia's wooing of him has not been without self-interest either. There was an awareness, too, that this is the moment in which things turn serious and the Christians' malicious antisemitic taunts to Shylock earlier on suddenly start to have real consequences. Many candidates did not really explore the presentation of Portia in the second half of the extract as she affirms her love for Bassanio ('never shall you lie by Portia's side/With an unquiet soul') or engage with ideas about her as a provider of justice as she moves from this moment to the Court scene. Less successful candidates simply tracked the passage to show where it sits in the play, making occasional comments about the more obvious lines or images. Some less successful responses were dominated by remarks about whether Bassanio has emotional feelings for Antonio.

Question 2

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *King Lear*

- (a) A small number of responses simply provided a character study of King Lear. Better responses deal with the prompt to examine what it says about both Goneril and Regan, as well as its

implications for Lear. The centre of the answer for the best candidates was Lear's madness and his growing awareness of his humanity once he is deprived of the trappings of power. The best responses considered Lear as king, father and man. Some responses tussled unsuccessfully with context, often citing the political uncertainties of Shakespeare's time; the best responses were able to use ideas about the natural order and the great chain of being to demonstrate deeper understanding of Lear's abuse of power and its consequences.

- (b) Weaker answers to this question tended to stick to a linear approach to the passage or move speedily away from it to a general consideration of the relationship between parents and children in the play. Better answers were able to focus on Gloucester's naivety and Edmund's villainy, with choosing to favour the wrong child seen as the root of the tragedy in both of the play's plots. Only the best responses really dealt with the detail of Edmund's soliloquy at the end. Responses that did so also engaged with the clear disparity between Gloucester's view of the world that humans are victims of the 'wisdom of nature' and Edmund's view that humans are responsible for their own destinies because of the 'surfeits of our own nature' and thus should not seek external forces to blame. And this insight, of course, unlocked the rest of the play for these candidates in terms of discussion of tragedy because it locates it firmly in character and human agency.

Section B: Drama

Question 3

ATHOL FUGARD: *The Train Driver and Other Plays*

- (a) Virtually all candidates were able to give an account of how the characters' pasts had created their present psychological states. Better candidates were able to focus more on the 'How' of the question, pointing out that Fugard presents past experience through monologues, re-enactment, dialogue, juxtaposition. The best answers were able to demonstrate close textual understanding of both the issue and theatrical techniques. A small number of responses only dealt with one play, thus not fully covering the question requirement. There was good understanding of the political context of these plays.
- (b) A number of candidates wrote with knowledge and understanding about *Coming Home* but then did not confront the issue of 'in these plays' except by implication. It is vital that a response to a (b) question reaches out beyond the passage given. Having said that, simply writing a general essay on dreams and ambitions, with little reference to the passage, is also an error. Those candidates who were able to balance both these elements often showed clear understanding of this particular moment, though surprisingly few actually used the song (lines 8–14, 41–56, so a major part of the extract) or the faked performance as a means of focusing the issue. There was much discussion of Veronica's thwarted defeat as she returns home. Contexts of AIDS and apartheid were well known and discussed, sometimes to the detriment of a discussion of the details of the passage.

Question 4

SHELAGH STEPHENSON: *An Experiment with an Air Pump*

- (a) Most responses showed clear understanding of the structure of the play and the ways in which the contrast between the two time periods create and energise the discussions about science, women and the process of history, all of which are central to the play. Many answers went beyond the instruction to 'contrast' and made the perfectly good case that the gender battle might be different in both periods, but the scientific discussions are much the same. There were some good responses that looked at the presentation of working-class characters as a means of focusing the discussion. The best responses were constantly aware of how the play might function as a work to be seen, and not just read.
- (b) At the lower end, a number of responses did not really respond to the graphic, visual strength of this scene as it might be presented on the stage. These responses often succumbed to a slightly prosaic, line-by-line approach to what is going on. Those that took a more strategic view were able to discuss the significance of the scene for the play's discussions about the ethics of scientific research, whilst at the same time responding in detail to the complexity of the passage, where Armstrong seems to others to be a saviour but is, in fact, anything but. Strangely, a number of responses located Isobel's suicide in her Scottishness and her role as a servant, not in her thwarted feelings and her realisation that she has been misled. On the whole, contexts were well

used to illuminate the themes of the play. There was often discussion of Brecht, which was best done when Brechtian techniques and ideas were actually illustrated from detail; simply dropping the name in was not enough to gain marks.

Question 5

TOM STOPPARD: *Indian Ink*

- (a) In some less successful responses, there was a lack of discrimination between the various English people presented, with the Empire seen as monolithic. Better responses saw that that Flora's reaction to India might have been seen by others to be naïve. There was much discussion of Durance and Mrs Swan as the representatives of inflexible, unthinking British colonialism. The best answers were able to discuss particular scenes – Mrs Swan's judgmental discussions with Anish were particularly popular. The more casual relationship between Flora and Das also provided much material for discussion. The best answers often pointed out that although Flora thinks she is open-minded, her reference points and security are often rather patronising, particularly as she is in India in part on a 'missionary' role to demonstrate the superiority of English liberal values through her talks. The context of Empire was well understood by all.
- (b) Some answers were inclined to narrative, but the better ones linked Flora's citing 'sex' as the subject of her poem, showing her rather unorthodox views, which are later discussed and analysed by Mrs Swan. The exact nature of the relationship of Das and Flora was pondered upon and linked to Eldon Pike's (dry) research for Flora's biography. More complex responses dealt with the fact that both people are artists, leaving exploration of their possibly sexual relationship at the edge of the discussion. The best responses were able to capture the tone of the scene and see that Flora's open-mindedness and quest for knowledge at this point demonstrates a willingness to engage with a different culture; this was often contrasted with Durance's intolerance elsewhere in the play.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/32
Shakespeare and Drama

Key messages

- Successful responses to **(b)** passage questions focus securely on analysis of the writing in the selected extract in great detail.
- Candidates should present their ideas within a logical and structured framework.
- Candidates should be reminded of the difference between background information and context.
- It is advisable for candidates to spend an equal amount of time on each question.

General comments

Examiners noted that most of the candidates had plainly enjoyed the texts that they had studied. No matter what their ability, it was clear that candidates had put effort into grappling with these plays and that the majority of them had worked hard to think of the texts as works to be staged, not simply read.

The most successful candidates gave thoughtful expositions of textual detail offered as a means of supporting and developing an argument. These candidates were able to offer a personal view which was relevant to their argument. There was often careful discussion of relevant contexts and a clear indication that critical views, when included, had been considered to deepen or add something to the candidate's own response. At the other end of the spectrum, there were candidates who were able to show knowledge of the plot and action of the plays but were not able to really shape their insight into an overall interpretation of the question. It was noted that many answers did not even mention the author's name. Most of the candidates – of course – fell somewhere in the middle.

At its simplest, **A01 Knowledge and Understanding** is taken to mean that a candidate can give an account of the central characters and events. To rise upwards through the levels, the criteria require that candidates manipulate what they know in order to answer a particular question. Candidates need to reflect on what the author is actually doing in terms of technique, and to think about the texts strategically in terms of form, structure, language, staging and so on. This involves both being able to identify features and then analyse the significance they create for the text as a whole. A candidate's points need to be substantiated with reference to particular moments in the text, rather than being provided as simple assertions. This is important in **(a)** questions, and essential in **(b)** passage questions.

The most successful candidates plan their writing (not necessarily by writing it down) and are aware of how much they can hope to write in an hour. They are aware that the length of a response does not substitute for quality of insight. Good answers do not always start by announcing a whole argument, or finish in a neat summary of what has been said. The rules for an exam essay are not the same as those that might be applied for a class or homework exercise. In the examination room, candidates have limited time, and are advised to begin their task of responding to the question, with reference to the text, as soon as they can, rather than wasting time attempting to write airy statements of intent or the perfect conclusion. This does not imply that responses do not need a structure. They do. But it does suggest that what has gone before, carefully argued and supported through reference to the text, will speak for itself.

Some successful candidates write at length because they have a lot to say which is of high quality; other candidates write at length because they cannot select material judiciously and often resort to narration of the

plot. Such responses are less successful. Candidates should apply the tone and register required for formal literary criticism with consistency.

With **(b)** questions it is sometimes important to position the extract in its larger context in order to make a point about structure, theme or characterisation, whilst avoiding excessive narrative. More generally, candidates need to be aware that when providing context, it should be *relevant* information (not background about the author) which might be used to inform a reading of the text under consideration. Candidates can interpret 'context' widely, in terms of literary, social and cultural contexts from the time in which the text was written; they can also use the time in which a text might be received. With this paper, therefore, a contemporary production of a Shakespeare play might be explored, noting, for example, that a modern director of *The Merchant of Venice* may take a more sympathetic view of Shylock than a 16th century director might have done. The important point, however, is that any context provided should be integral to a candidate's argument and supported from the detail of the text. Thus, it is perfectly legitimate to talk about Brecht when discussing *An Experiment with an Air Pump* but only if the reference is followed through and a candidate then talks about the effect of alienation that an audience may feel as a result of named and explored dramatic strategies. Simply mentioning Brecht does not contribute to the argument in a successful response. It follows, therefore, that the boundary between context and the view of 'others' can become blurred, such that less successful candidates fail to engage with either context or critics.

A number of candidates wrote at length on one question and then were unable to provide a full second response. No matter how good the first answer is, it can never compensate for a skimmed second response. Even if an answer is going really well, the best advice for a candidate is that after an hour they should turn to the second question, perhaps leaving space to write some more on the first answer if they have time at the end.

Finally, a small matter but one of significance: candidates should ensure that they number their responses correctly.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Shakespeare

Question 1

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *The Merchant of Venice*

- (a)** Many responses simply chose some of the characters and produced a list of moments where they displayed selfish behaviour and are self-serving. They are not hard to find – even Portia is hardly altruistic at times. Bassanio was often very unsympathetically seen as being entirely self-interested and money driven. Better responses were able to interrogate the question and see that the characters are more complex. Portia plainly has feeling for Antonio because of her love for Bassanio; Shylock's true self interest would not be served by killing Antonio for his pound of flesh because then he would lose his money. Various, candidates adduced as contexts culture, tradition, and religion, with some of the best responses arguing that perhaps the patriarchy can be blamed in part for some of Portia and Jessica's behaviour.
- (b)** Most responses centred on an audience's reaction to Shylock at this point, with much focus on his resounding defence of his humanity: 'Hath not a Jew eyes? ...'. There was also discussion of his personal life and his feelings of loss over Jessica's elopement. Better responses were able to respond to the passage as a whole, noting that his feelings of loss transform themselves into emotions of revenge towards Christians. Thus, sympathy created is dissipated by his glee about the loss of Antonio's ships ('good news – ha, ha!', 'I am very glad of it ... I'll torture him'). This naturally led to much discussion of the context of Jewish/Christian relationships in the play as a whole. Many responses worked hard to establish the tone of the scene as this is the moment in which much of the lightness of the earlier acts evaporates and the claim to the play as a comedy becomes increasingly tenuous. There was some useful comment on Solanio's antisemitic insults as a demonstration of how Shylock is casually and constantly mistreated throughout, even by minor characters, thus demonstrating that racism is endemic in Venice, not restricted to Antonio. Some candidates made useful reference to productions of the play that they had seen.

Question 2

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *King Lear*

- (a) Candidates were usually confident about the relationships between the two plots of the play and the various ways in which relationships between fathers and their children are portrayed in the play. Many candidates were better at talking about the earlier scenes in the play, with only the better responses discussing Lear's 'reconciliation' with Cordelia or Gloucester's realisation about the way in which he has been fooled by Edmund. Some candidates commented interestingly on the way in which both Lear and Gloucester find substitute families during the course of the play.
- (b) Useful comments were often made about Lear's appearance 'dressed with weeds' as a physical demonstration of his madness. There was much discussion, too, of how Lear expresses himself in a mixture of prose and blank verse and of how his ranting is both sense and nonsense at the same time. There was often discussion of how the madness is gradually working towards self-knowledge, with Lear's proffering of the hand that 'smells of mortality' to Gloucester. Some of the best answers were able to remark on how other characters commenting on Lear's plight and behaviour is part of the dramatic presentation, as seen here with Gloucester's 'O ruin'd piece of nature!' and Edgar's 'my heart breaks at it'. As always, the best candidates took a strategic view of the passage, rather than approaching it line by line. Many answers simply did not deal sufficiently with the detail of the words presented or the arc of this particular scene, preferring to see the question as being about Lear's madness *in general* instead.

Section B: Drama

Question 3

ATHOL FUGARD: *The Train Driver and Other Plays*

- (a) Candidates were able to talk about the use of prologues and epilogues as framing devices for the main action of the plays. Sometimes they were simply seen as providing background information, but better responses were able to characterise the tone of the speeches often contrasting the eloquence of Simon in *The Train Driver* with Henry's uncertain ineptness at both the beginning and end of *Have You Seen Us?* The best answers were able to note that these speeches are monologues which stand apart from the action because at these points we are able to see what the characters are thinking to themselves, without the interaction with others. A small number of (usually good) candidates saw the prologues and epilogues as over-long and tedious, a demonstration of Fugard's inability to truly dramatise this material; others saw them as a means of giving perspective on the action.
- (b) A number of responses focused almost entirely on Veronica as a victim and allowed discussion about AIDS to get in the way of a fully detailed response to the action and pathos of the extract. Better responses avoided polemic: they examined the highly personal drama that develops as Veronica reveals her past to us and to the other characters. The spare but significant stage directions were often used by many candidates to point out how she is seeking to involve Alfred in her plight. The best responses were able to discuss Alfred's role in the scene, his shiftiness and sudden realisation of his guilt and then of what Veronica has in mind ('*He is struggling with the unspeakable.*') There was often much useful connection (often focused on the mothers, or on feelings of guilt) between the plays in the better responses. The contexts were understood by all candidates.

Question 4

SHELAGH STEPHENSON: *An Experiment with an Air Pump*

- (a) Many candidates saw Isobel an entirely representative figure, an example of the exploited and victimised working class in the 18th century. With this interpretation she was often seen as entirely symbolic, with a clear comparison made between her and the bird in Joseph Wright's picture, as is made explicit at the end of the play. Other responses were able to see how she is more fully developed by Stephenson because of her comments and the audience's sympathy for her feelings. Some candidates compared her with Phil in the modern scenes, a useful measure of how things have changed for the working classes. Some candidates simply wrote a character study that did not really deal with the precise requirements of the question.

- (b) Responses usually dealt thoughtfully with the merging of the two time periods showing, among other things, the advancement of women in professional spheres, a far cry from Armstrong's dictum about keeping women away from science. The ethical dilemmas were dealt with thoughtfully, and the links to the rest of the play were well covered. The best responses were able to comment on the staging, the use of the same actors in both parts of the play, and the fluid structure that Stephenson uses to create her points. Brecht was often mentioned, but only the best responses were able to demonstrate how Stephenson actually uses Brechtian techniques in this play.

Question 5

TOM STOPPARD: *Indian Ink*

- (a) A small number of candidates simply wrote about Eldon Pike's character. Better responses were able to see that Stoppard uses him to fill in background and as a link between the present moment and the 1930s, particularly when he comments on the action directly. The best candidates, of course, saw his dry pedantry for what it is – a sharp focus for Stoppard's satire about biographers and literary critics – particularly Americans – who feel that presenting every detail, no matter how trivial ('... the Queen's Elm' - *Pike*: A public house in the Fulham area of Chelsea.) gives life to a historical subject. Candidates often felt – rightly – that he is self-serving, with no real interest in Flora except as an aid to his career; others thought his interest in her rather prurient. The best responses were able to see that Pike's sterile fact-finding is wildly at odds with what we, the audience, see before us when Flora is on the stage. One or two extremely well-read candidates were able to point out parallels with Stoppard's later play *Arcadia*. On the whole, contexts were well understood and suitably used to illuminate and deepen responses.
- (b) Most candidates were able to make a clear contrast between Durance and Flora in this scene. Durance was seen as the representative of the full panoply of the British Empire, with some sense of how in this particular scene he is using friendliness as a means of extracting information from Flora whilst at the same time trying to coerce her into behaving as a memsahib ('The game is different here'). Flora, on the other hand, was seen as the representative of a liberal sort of Britishness which wants to treat India and Indians as equals. The best responses were able to see that the easy-going relaxed atmosphere just before this scene opens is anathema to Durance, who immediately shows his ignorance of the people he is supposed to rule. Many responses dealt well with the way in which Das's previous confidence subsides into embarrassed, diffident servility once there are two English people present. Some responses dwelt a little too long on Durance as a potential suitor for Flora, a point that is not particularly relevant in their first meeting. Contexts were well used by virtually all candidates. Links were often made between Durance and Mrs Swan, usually to demonstrate that Flora's liberal attitudes were generally disapproved of by the custodians of 'moral' values in the Raj. The best responses sometimes noted that, for all her liberality and subversion, Flora is in charge, a memsahib nonetheless.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

<p>Paper 9695/33 Shakespeare and Drama</p>
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Key messages

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General comments

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The most successful candidates gave thoughtful expositions of textual detail offered as a means of supporting and developing an argument. These candidates were able to offer a personal view which was relevant to their argument. There was often careful discussion of relevant contexts and a clear indication that critical views, when included, had been considered to deepen or add something to the candidate's own response. At the other end of the spectrum, there were candidates who were able to show knowledge of the plot and action of the plays but were not able to really shape their insight into an overall interpretation of the question. It was noted that many answers did not even mention the author's name. Most of the candidates – of course – fell somewhere in the middle.

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candidates need to be aware that when providing context, it should be *relevant* information (not background about the author) which might be used to inform a reading of the text under consideration. Candidates can interpret 'context' widely, in terms of literary, social and cultural contexts from the time in which the text was written; they can also use the time in which a text might be received. With this paper, therefore, a contemporary production of a Shakespeare play might be explored, noting, for example, that a modern director of *The Merchant of Venice* may take a more sympathetic view of Shylock than a 16th century director might have done. The important point, however, is that any context provided should be integral to a candidate's argument and supported from the detail of the text. Thus, it is perfectly legitimate to talk about Brecht when discussing *An Experiment with an Air Pump* but only if the reference is followed through and a candidate then talks about the effect of alienation that an audience may feel as a result of named and explored dramatic strategies. Simply mentioning Brecht does not contribute to the argument in a successful response. It follows, therefore, that the boundary between context and the view of 'others' can become blurred, such that less successful candidates fail to engage with either context or critics.

A number of candidates wrote at length on one question and then were unable to provide a full second response. No matter how good the first answer is, it can never compensate for a skimmed second response. Even if an answer is going really well, the best advice for a candidate is that after an hour they should turn to the second question, perhaps leaving space to write some more on the first answer if they have time at the end.

Finally, a small matter but one of significance: candidates should ensure that they number their responses correctly.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Shakespeare

Question 1

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *The Merchant of Venice*

- (a) There were a wide variety of answers on this question about the significance of Venice. Many made contrasts between Belmont and Venice, seeing one as centred on love, the other on money. The most subtle responses, of course, were able to see that the two places have much in common in terms of how trading (for money or for affection) is realised in the play. Less good responses were able to give a clear account of how Venice and its values are dramatised through the major characters. There was much relevant discussion of Venice as a trading centre and of the relationship between the Jewish and Christian populations in the city as a means of evoking context.
- (b) This was the most popular question on the paper. Candidates were able to identify the tensions in the scene and argue convincingly that Shylock's dual motivation (preserving his business and his hatred of Christians) presents him unfavourably at this point. Most candidates noted, too, that Shylock dominates the scene and that the initial 'aside' gives us an insight that Antonio and Bassanio do not have. The best answers were able to broaden out at times – whilst still maintaining the passage as a central focus – to discuss the audience's changing view of Shylock and his bond with the Christians in the play as a whole. A small number of candidates became fixated on exposition of Shylock's reference to Laban's sheep without recognising that it is Shylock's coded warning ('But note me, signior') about what might happen in the future. There was much useful comment on Antonio and Bassanio's complacent condescension towards Shylock and the concealed view in the aside that Shylock is, in fact, a devil.

Question 2

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *King Lear*

- (a) A number of candidates responded only to the bare question without reference to the quotation cited. Those that did make use of the quotation were able to get deeper because they were able to see that it located the question fully in Lear's growing self-awareness and consciousness that people have only been obedient and quiescent with him because he was king, not because they respected him as an individual. Most answers went beyond Lear and argued that there is a tension between those who accept political power as their given lot and those like Goneril, Regan and

Edmund who will use any means to gain and abuse it. Many candidates pointed out that this could be contextualised in terms of the political uncertainties and changing world view of Shakespeare's own era.

- (b) Candidates were quick to recognise that the passage given is a pivotal point in the play, the moment where Lear realises finally that both Goneril and Regan have turned against him. The best answers pointed out Lear's sense of shock and vulnerability, but they also tussled with the idea that Lear's behaviour is borne of his lack of self-awareness and that his pleading at lines 35–45 is the beginning of his journey towards self-knowledge. Some candidates also recognised that at this point we have not yet seen the full evil of the two sisters and thus might retain some element of sympathy as they try to deal with their father's irrational demands. 'I gave you all', says Lear. It is not without justification that Regan replies snippily: 'and in good time you gave it', thus contextualising the fact that the gift was not made in good faith on Lear's part. Looking wider, candidates dealt sometimes with Lear's madness, sometimes with ongoing relationships between parents and children. On a more technical front, some responses saw that there were image patterns here that run throughout.

Section B: Drama

Question 3

ATHOL FUGARD: *The Train Driver and Other Plays*

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

Question 4

SHELAGH STEPHENSON: *An Experiment with an Air Pump*

- (a) There were a very restricted number of responses to this question. Candidates were able to see that the setting of the house in Newcastle allows Stephenson to move freely between the two time periods of the play, with the 20th century scenes acting as a refracting mirror to the 18th century scenes. There was much discussion of the similarities between the scientists in both periods, with candidates noting readily that the real change lies in the fact that in the contemporary discussions, it is a woman who leads the discussion on scientific morality, not a man. There was, rightly, much discussion of how Stephenson presents the consequences of a lack of ethics in science through staging the discovery of Isobel's skeleton.
- (b) Answers to this question revolved round the discussions about scientific ethics that run throughout the scene. There was also much discussion about Stephenson's interest in contrasting the role of women here with that presented in the 18th century sections of the play. The discussion of the apparent opposition of the arts and the sciences was also evoked as central. Many candidates drew attention to the ironies of Kate admitting (jokingly) that she would dissect her own mother in the name of scientific research 'but only if she was dead already', bearing in mind the dark secret about the past that is about to be revealed.

Question 5

TOM STOPPARD: *Indian Ink*

- (a) Most candidates were able to give examples of moments in the play where writing and painting are evoked. Indeed, many commented on how densely packed the play is with references to biographies, journals, memoirs, poems, letters, and references to other books. The same is true of the contrast between European and Indian art, which is constantly present in the play. The best answers were able to link all these things to the big themes (colonialisation, for example) and see that both art and literature trigger the dramatic tensions in the play. There was much interesting discussion of the role of Pike and the sterility of his work.
- (b) Candidates were able to respond to this question by observing that Flora's life as presented is very different from the pedantic version of it that Pike is trying to capture with his interventions throughout the scene. There was often comment on the various ways in the play in which past and

present melt into each other (*The RESIDENT and the ENGLISHWOMAN dance into view ...*). Candidates were normally confident about the colonial issues, with the end of the extract evoked as a demonstration of British dominance and closed-mindedness ('we tend to mix more'/'With the Indians?'/ 'No.'). Many candidates commented on Flora's growing awareness of the peculiarities and rigidities of colonial life.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

<p>Paper 9695/41 Pre- and Post-1900 Poetry and Prose</p>
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Key messages

- Successful responses focus on how to convey ideas about literature clearly, developing ideas in a relevant and appropriate structure.
- The opinions and interpretations of others should be closely linked to the question asked and should connect with the candidate's arguments.
- Candidates should ensure that examination time is used strategically to address questions equally.
- Successful responses make good use of specific examples. This relates to selection of quotations and references and also aspects of context.

General comments

Clear enthusiasm and engagement was shown by most candidates in terms of the texts studied. Personal exploration of ideas, themes and concerns were often lively, with some confidence in analysis and evaluation of effects. This was evident across the ability range and confirmed that candidates have gained a great deal of insight and enjoyment from their reading and study of the novels and poets.

Unfortunately, there were some rubric infringements, where candidates wrote about either two prose or two poetry texts or wrote about two texts from the same time period. In addition, this series there were a significant number only offering one answer, often of modest length. It is strongly advised that teachers and leaders in centres check that the texts selected for study meet the requirements of the specification.

The knowledge and understanding demonstrated by candidates working at the top levels was wide ranging and focused closely on the question. Candidates benefited greatly from the confidence that results in deep knowledge of the texts and this underpins their arguments and development of points. The skill of directing knowledge and understanding to meet the demands of a particular question in exam conditions is one deployed to good effect in the best answers. Candidates in the middle levels of the mark range often showed secure knowledge and understanding but tended to be less consistent in its use and delivery. These candidates shifted away from the relevant focus, exploring one point too rigorously, perhaps repeating aspects, to the detriment of a broader argument. Candidates working in the lower levels of the mark scheme often used their knowledge and understanding in a narrative manner, missing opportunities to develop arguments and personal responses. Quotations not only support arguments, but also enable candidates to develop their analysis. Some candidates used very long quotations or detached them entirely from paragraphs. This is not a helpful approach, limiting the candidate's ability to show evidence of analysis. The best answers use short, embedded quotations as part of their argument, integrating with relevance and comment. Quotations that are used with little reason or comment do not enable secure discussion. When writing about a given poem, some more successful responses made effective and relevant reference to the characteristic methods of the poet, referring to specific details of other works. Less successful answers either did not mention the wider work of the poet at all or simply referred to titles of other poems.

Some excellent and very sophisticated analysis was seen in answers at the top end of the mark range. The best analysis was interleaved with knowledge, personal understanding and contextual awareness, resulting in original and thought-provoking discussions. It is creditable when complex literary techniques and metalanguage are used deliberately and accurately to exemplify a point, but some candidates are using rare and advanced terminology inappropriately or without explanation. The least successful analysis listed techniques in a sentence without exemplification (feature spotting) or offered general comments such as 'The writer uses metaphors, alliteration, onomatopoeia and rhyme in their poetry.' This tells the examiner nothing about the candidate's ability to understand and interrogate the effects of text.

The clarity, structure and register of answers was commented upon by examiners this year. Candidates, having read and understood a text, respond to it through written form and it is important that they optimise the success of their arguments in their written response. Planning strategically, no matter what form this plan might take is essential in ensuring a cohesive and relevant response. Plans do not have to take a long time to create and should be personal to the candidate's style. These almost always keep the candidate on track and contribute to a focused approach in the examination time. Planning also helps candidates achieve balance across the two answers. Examiners noted that a significant number of candidates were writing a good deal more on one answer to the detriment of the second, perhaps favouring one text over another. This is not helpful as a strong first answer cannot reasonably compensate for a brief or unfinished second answer. As questions are equally weighted, candidates are strongly advised to spend half the time on each of the two questions. Leaving a small amount of time for editing is advisable and can make a difference to marks as mistakes are corrected and ideas clarified during the process. The best candidates balance their time and prioritise their points to shape their answers. Sometimes examiners see an approach of writing a general introduction which does not necessarily explain the direction for the essay, and a conclusion which is virtually the same as the introduction. Examiners recognise that the time limitations within the examination room mean that an exam essay cannot be structured as neatly as an essay done for homework. Having said this, it is still advisable to frame their argument with a strategic direction or thesis statement in the introduction, however brief. The body of the essay should lead to a conclusion that reflects the journey of the argument, rather than a repeated summary of the introduction. Some successful answers feature concluding paragraphs that summarise a personal view, sometimes supported with a reference to another opinion or interpretation. One note to impress upon candidates is the importance of recording the correct question number at the start of their answer. This enables a clear view of the focus chosen and leaves the examiner in no doubt about which question is being attempted.

Personal response was often a strength of answers at all levels of ability. The best answers offered original and thought-provoking responses, carefully linking points to the focus of the chosen question and to details of the extract in **(b)** questions. Engagement was often lively and perceptive. Work reaching the middle range of achievement often opened interesting personal responses without developing or supporting these ideas, thus limiting their impact. Examiners reported seeing some examples of speculation or reflections of personal experience which lost focus on textual detail and concepts.

The application of knowledge and understanding of context varies considerably amongst candidates with some offering entirely erroneous comments that undermine the value of their answers and others offering biographical details about a writer that are not relevant to the question being asked. **(b)** questions require candidates to demonstrate awareness of where the extract falls in the wider work. In terms of poetry, it is a requirement to contextualise the poem within the poet's wider work with reference to details of the collection and characteristic features. Several examiners have reported seeing essays about poems that appear to be approached as unseen material. This does not meet the requirements of the specification. Context informs reading of a text and may include references to literary, social, historical or cultural aspects. Where candidates use context, this should support relevant arguments linked to the question, for example, using references to American Transcendentalism in relation to aspects of Emily Dickinson's style and concerns, and exploring the possible influence of the Puritan revival on her views of death. Including details of Dickinson's date of birth and hometown in isolation do not constitute contextual reference but were seen regularly by examiners. The best context appears seamlessly as part of a coherent argument.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Pre-1900 Poetry and Prose

Question 1

JANE AUSTEN: *Persuasion*

- (a)** There were several answers to this question on Austen's presentation of the Musgrove family. The best answers explored the role of the family in contrast to the Elliots, using awareness of class and snobbery to develop coherent arguments. Less successful answers ran out of points to make after exploring these contrasts and there was little reference to the comic self-centredness of Mary or the stupidity of Charles or Mrs Musgrove's grief over her worthless son. The least successful answers lacked detailed textual knowledge, leading to some general approaches and lack of development. These focused on areas such as the Musgroves' dislike for Mary and preference for Anne, often drifting into narrative retelling of parts of the novel. Only the best answers were able to

effectively analyse Austen's presentation, referring to details of characterisation, dialogue and structure.

- (b) This question on a passage from Volume 2, Chapter 11 was more popular than the (a) question and a wider range of responses was seen. Some very effective answers were seen by candidates who clearly enjoyed exploring the passage and its significance to the wider novel. Some detailed precise links such as the importance of overhearing conversation in the text as a whole. Relevant contextual points were seen on the Augustan Age and Romantic movement. Most candidates were able to explain the immediate context of Anne and Harville's conversation and how Anne's claim that women love longest when hope is gone is reflected in the letter. Most referred to the wider context of the broken engagement. There was some purposeful and relevant analysis of how Austen builds reader tension, for example, 'Wentworth's haste, Anne's surprise at his sudden leaving and even more sudden return, all leading to her opening his letter'. There was also some discussion of setting, the Navy and use of Anne's point of view as it shifts the reader's expectations. Weaker responses tended to summarise the passage and lapsed into narrative response at times leading to some superficial handling of the passage.

Question 2

GEOFFREY CHAUCER: *The Merchant's Prologue and Tale*

- (a) This question was quite popular and required candidates to explore Chaucer's presentation of lust and desire in the tale. Some very successful and detailed responses were seen from candidates who clearly knew the text very well and were confident in considering its context and meaning. Examiners remarked on the extent to which many candidates enjoyed writing their answer to this question, particularly in discussion of the activity in the pear tree. Some candidates made comparisons between the garden and Eden and referred to the ironic connection between the warm wax, originally alluded to by Januarie, and May's use of it in duplicating the key. Some answers focused entirely on Januarie's licentiousness and others made interesting comparisons between Januarie and May's desire. Some thought-provoking answers read the whole text as a condemnation of lust at the expense of meaningful emotional relationships between men and women. Chaucer's use of the 'divine intervention of Pluto and Proserpina to undermine the human and Christian attitudes to love and lust' was one example of an articulate and sophisticated analytical point. Less successful answers treated characters and relationships separately with a mixture between those who viewed Januarie as a 'creepy old man' or as 'someone trying to mend his ways before it is too late'. There was good deal of generalisation about how society in the Middle Ages viewed women and sex. Analysis of narrative structure was evident with variable awareness of the roles of the Merchant and Chaucer in the narrative voice. Better answers used carefully chosen textual detail to support their ideas while less successful answers made broader reference.
- (b) This question was similar in popularity to the (a) question. Candidates were required to discuss the presentation of May and Januarie's relationship through close analysis of an extract and its wider significance to the tale. Some interesting analysis was seen in relation to the Edenic connections to lust and sin offered by the setting of the Garden. Some candidates sympathised with Januarie commenting that now he is blind he seems more loving towards May while others considered the literal and metaphorical blindness, some suggesting that this prevents him from seeing her true character. Arguments occasionally developed into discussions of appearance and reality with personal discussions about how couples only present false versions of themselves to each other. Coherent analysis of dialogue, setting and characterisation was seen, for example, Januarie's 'insecurity and uncertainty and neediness contrasted with [May's] false avowals of fidelity'. The most effective answers focused on the significance of effects of particular words and phrases such as 'blynd as is a stoon' and 'body bond'. Less confident responses relied on narrative approaches to the relationship with some bringing out some aspects of the dramatic irony of the situation. It is clear that the candidates who chose this text, working at all levels of ability, find the text's themes and concerns accessible and enjoyable.

Question 3

EMILY DICKINSON: Selected Poems

- (a) This question required candidates to write about how Dickinson presents human relationships in three poems. This is a very popular text but of the two choices, this was least popular, and few

responses were seen. Most candidates answering this question found the idea of human relationships challenging. Poems chosen included: *Wild Nights – Wild Nights!*, *I did not reach Thee, I have never seen ‘Volcanoes’* and *My Life had stood – a Loaded Gun* –. Some candidates offered broad arguments about Dickinson’s relationships with death or nature with variable success. Some wrote about the use of personification of animals or natural phenomena, but these lacked insights and were not closely allied to the question. Less successful answers were made up of three separate summaries with little sense of appreciation of characteristic techniques. Links to biographical details formed an attempt to include context. A few good answers were seen that demonstrated subtle engagement with detail and developed arguments related to Dickinson’s poetic methods and concerns.

- (b) This was a very popular question attracting answers across the ability range with diverse interpretations and views about the meaning and detail of the poem. The question required candidates to explore the poem *I heard a Fly buzz – when I died* – in relation to Dickinson’s exploration of death. The best answers offered exceptionally relevant interpretations of the fly’s significance in terms of death, and the process of dying and immortality, with original and sensitive personal responses to this poem and other related works in the selection. Poems used to contextualise included *This World is not Conclusion*, *I Felt a Funeral, in my Brain*, and *Because I could not stop for Death* –. Strong answers used close analysis with exploration of wider work to consider Dickinson’s views on God, nature, humanity and the afterlife. Analysis considered Dickinson’s use of imagery, caesura and punctuation, and the use of first-person voice as an ‘assumed identity in Emily’s imagination’. Fascinating interpretations included ideas about the fly in mortal life contrasting with the ‘expectation of meeting God on the other side’ and the idea that Dickinson was trying to ‘humourize’ death by mocking conventional clichés. This idea explored the view that at the sombre and momentous point of enlightenment of death, with the family standing by, the presence of the fly subverted the gravity of the event. Less successful answers struggled to judge whether or not the persona was in fact dead or not. There is a point at which considering alternative interpretations can become speculative and this was reached by some candidates who offered some outré explanations for the symbolism of the fly as the figure of death, the ‘King’, Satan or Dickinson herself without articulating that a range of different views exist. Without some kind of explanation to this effect, answers can appear contradictory. The essence of ‘O’ in the mark scheme is to ensure awareness of different interpretations with support and evaluation. Some weaker answers focused their analysis almost exclusively on Dickinson’s use of dashes and capitalisation. Some answers struggled to go beyond a description of the fly and how it hovers in and out of the poem, with some attempts to explain its significance.

Question 4

JOHN DONNE: Selected Poems

- (a) This question required candidates to consider how and in what ways Donne presents powerful emotions in three poems. The question attracted few answers and most seen were either very good or towards the lower end of the mid-range. Poems chosen included *The Relic*, *The Flea* and *The Sun Rising*. One very good response chose two love poems and a religious sonnet, arguing effectively that Donne showed as much passion in religious poems as in love poems. Understanding and analysis of Donne’s use of conceits, dramatic situations and direct address were perceptive and scholarly in some answers, demonstrating an assured insight into the poet’s poetic methods. Less successful responses tended to write separate mini essays about three poems with broad discussion of emotions and little sense of style of poetic methods.
- (b) This question focused on *The Undertaking* and was more popular than (a). Examiners noted a range of answers across the ability range with weaker answers sometimes appearing as unseen critical analysis with no real grasp of Donne’s work or concerns in the round. These less confident answers struggled to clarify who the ‘you’ was or what was to be hidden, trying to form arguments about Donne’s attitudes to women. As in other questions on poems, feature spotting of aspects such as alliteration were evident. Better answers demonstrated knowledge and understanding of the poem and were aware that the speaker is not necessarily the poet. The best answers offered informed and detailed analysis, explaining the Worthies and the specular stone as well as the irony and satirical tone of bragging about keeping platonic love hidden. Other poems used to exemplify Donne’s work included *The Flea* but many answers seen confined themselves to the given poem.

Question 5

THOMAS HARDY: *Far from the Madding Crowd*

- (a) This question required candidates to respond to a quotation about Bathsheba, 'Bathsheba is honest and simple', considering Hardy's presentation of the character. A reasonable number of responses were seen with the question working well in terms of providing a ready-made structure that enabled candidates to achieve well at Level 4 and above. Many answers developed three-part essays exploring what 'simple' meant, what 'honest' meant and considered how Bathsheba met and did not meet these definitions. The best answers looked at the statement and unpicked it, showing why this is an oversimplification of Bathsheba and why she is a much more complex character. Where candidates committed to wholesale agreement with the statement without clarification, there was a tendency to work through the novel in a selectively narrative-driven justification of this argument. Even some of those who dealt with areas of the story where Bathsheba is portrayed in more complex terms still insisted on the statement being true with arguments becoming shoehorned to that view in some cases. This question presented an excellent opportunity to develop a response that evaluated other opinions and ideas, which unfortunately some candidates missed. Straightforward responses discussed Bathsheba's relationships and attempts to be independent, though they rarely mentioned her reliance on Gabriel. Some explored her impulsive behaviour in attracting Boldwood's attention as leading to complications as she battles between her sense of guilty obligation and her real desires.
- (b) This question attracted a similar number of answers to the (a) question. An extract from Chapter 44 formed the basis of discussion surrounding Hardy's presentation of Troy here and elsewhere in the novel. Answers were seen across the ability range and seemed to inspire candidates to refer to the wider text with the best candidates using detailed knowledge and understanding to contrast Hardy's presentation of Troy's demeanour here with examples of his self-assured and proud behaviour when showing off to Bathsheba and his arrogance in demanding money and disregard for the farm. The best answers took note of the authorial comment on the futility and absurdity of Troy's actions; the extravagance of his planting and the contrast with Oak's labours battling the storm and Fanny's walk to Casterbridge. Less successful responses offered more general answers
- (c) about Troy with little use of the detail of the passage. Only a few recognised that the passage provides evidence of humanity and vulnerability in the character of Troy. The weakest answers were restricted to narrative and paraphrase of the given passage with some personal response in terms of Troy's feelings and Hardy's use of nature.

Question 6

BRAM STOKER: *Dracula*

- (a) There were several responses to this question about how Stoker shapes a reader's response to Van Helsing. The best answers were able to connect Stoker's presentation of Van Helsing with some of the main concerns of the text such as religion versus science, superstition and the supernatural, attitudes of Western Europe versus Eastern Europe, and appearance versus reality. They recognised Van Helsing as an embodiment of scientific knowledge who is still open minded enough to consider other factors like the supernatural and willing to use religious means to combat evil as well as employing scientific logic. Some saw him as a compromise or halfway house between the East and West of Europe with others suggesting that Stoker presents him in a partially comic light with his 'funny accent' which might deter the reader from taking him seriously. Some contrasted Van Helsing as 'the good foreigner' with Dracula as the 'bad foreigner', thus enabling links to context in terms of Victorian attitudes to 'outsiders'. Most candidates were aware of Stoker's characterisation of Van Helsing as the antithesis of Dracula as one put it 'in his care and love of humanity, his morality and his selfless self-sacrifice'. Less successful answers showed a lack of detailed knowledge and supporting evidence, both of the ways he is introduced and perceived by others as well as significant events.
- (b) This question was more popular than (a) with candidates showing great enthusiasm in writing about the extract from Chapter 7, the Log of the 'Demeter'. The whole ability range was seen. Less successful answers struggled to make sense of the passage and picked out some dramatic details, but swiftly moved on to areas of the novel where they felt more comfortable, such as Harker's stay at Dracula's castle. Some became distracted in lengthy discussions about the unreliability of the narrator's view. Others tried to engage more constructively and purposefully with the passage, looking at different ways in which Dracula is presented. These tended to focus on otherworldliness

and supernatural hovering but there was also some relevant focus on the reactions of others to Dracula's presence. Some very good answers were seen discussing ways in which Stoker uses gothic tropes to convey horror and terror in the reader. Better answers focused on methods as well as concerns with effective consideration of Stoker's use of different viewpoints and epistolary style, commenting on how these features helped to create tension and a sense of horror. Some focused on the use of dramatic irony here as readers are more aware of the identity of the 'monster' than the Demeter's crew. Some good examples of close analysis related to the Captain's mirroring of Van Helsing's determination in his commitment to fulfil his duty to the ship.

Section B: Post-1900 Poetry and Prose

Question 7

MARGARET ATTWOOD: *The Handmaid's Tale*

- (a) This was by far the most popular text on the paper, but more candidates chose to answer the (b) question. The (a) question required candidates to write about the contribution made by 'The Historical Notes' to the novel as a whole. Answers to this question tended to be either very good or very weak with little seen in between. Some responses lacked knowledge of the specific part of the novel leading to bland outcomes with lack of secure understanding of the significance of this section.

There were some strong personal responses with reference to feminist readings, some noting that little has changed in the society of the novel as it is still 'history' rather than 'herstory'. The significance of 'The Historical Notes' was considered by a few candidates as part of the male domination and patriarchy, noting that 'even in death Offred is defined by men who don't understand her'. Some mentioned Pieixoto's chauvinist attitudes and jokes such as the pun on 'Tale' and 'Tail' and the ironic connection with the work of Chaucer. Arguments often suggested that this is all part of Atwood's warning to wake up to the threat of authoritarian, right-wing regimes. Across the answers on this text, candidates convincingly gave their views on how Atwood's novel reflects frightening truths about recent and contemporary societies and oppressive regimes. Analysis included reference to the potential for unreliable narration in the novel and there was broad awareness of possible interpretations. The best answers used relevant quotation to back up sensitive arguments, referring to the idea that the notes supported Offred's accounts of the ceremonies and commenting on the irony of the ending in 'Are there any questions?'

- (b) This was a very popular answer, and all levels of achievement were seen. It is clear that candidates have relished writing about this text, with some presenting heartfelt personal opinions. Most candidates were able to recognise how the passage from Chapter 17 fitted into the wider novel and were able to explore the significance of public versus private space in Gilead. Answers tended to be stronger on concerns rather than narrative methods, with many making use of a Marxist view on the commodification of the Handmaids' fertility, suggested by the use of 'containers' and other dehumanising references. Others considered a feminist perspective, exploring central ideas such as the collaboration of the Wives in the oppression of the Handmaids.

The passage enabled the most able candidates to explore the minutiae of Offred's private life, pared down to basics but still vital and creative. They managed to explore ways in which Offred does or does not present with agency or radicalism in this passage and the novel as a whole. Some very good responses traced the narrator's emotions in the passage from the short, matter-of-fact sentences to the more emotionally sensitive, and complex descriptions of the room and the moon.

There were many references to the butter with consideration of symbolism and the humour in Offred's simile, 'Buttered ... like a piece of toast.' Many commented on the small rebellions, with stronger answers moving from the theft of the butter to her appreciation of the beauty of the moon. Some explored Atwood's characterisation, the effects of sentence structure at the beginning and its focus on actions in comparison to her reflections on her identity and being 'more than valuable' at the end. Most were able to explain the symbolism of the colours. Candidates working at Level 4 and above were able to select strategically from the passage and wider text to develop coherent and focused arguments. The final paragraph provoked thoughtful responses from many candidates who considered her loneliness and 'desire to cling to her past'.

Less successful answers used the passage as a springboard to more general discussion of the text, wandering away from the passage to recount Offred's experiences in other parts of the novel. Candidates working at the lower end of the mark range tended to be unaware of the textual context, though most identified that these were Offred's thoughts when she is alone in the room.

Question 8

SUJATA BHATT: Selected Poems from *Point No Point*

- (a) Too few responses were seen to comment.
- (b) There were a restricted number of answers to this question. Candidates were asked to write a critical appreciation of the poem *Counting Sheep White Blood Cells*. Some candidates approached analysis and discussion of the poem skilfully but made no wider reference to Bhatt's work or characteristic methods and concerns. As with other poets on the paper, some answers appeared to treat the poem as an unseen text. Some candidates contrasted the difficulty and monotony of the lab assistant's work with her enjoyment and enthusiasm as she feels 'wired', though 'numb' at the end of the day. Some worked systematically through the poem, commenting on aspects such as flower imagery and repetition. Others attempted to match the free verse form to the whirling thoughts and exhaustion of the characters. Only a few answers showed understanding of the connection with cancer patients in the hospital. They noted the use of scientific vocabulary, and some made connections with other poems such as *Angels' Wings* and *The Echoes in Poona* as well as poems about the use of animals in medical contexts. Few commented on the final lines.

Question 9

JAMES JOYCE: *Dubliners*

- (a) This question required candidates to respond to a quotation, 'Joyce presents life in Dublin as bleak and oppressive', considering how far they agreed with the statement with reference to two stories. There were few answers to this question. Good answers ranged across several stories, tending to agree with the statement and exploring the oppression of women and role of the Catholic Church in the hopelessness of life in Dublin. These answers showed good knowledge and understanding, using well-chosen quotations to support arguments. The most popular stories were *Eveline*, *Araby* and *The Sisters*. Straightforward answers tended to summarise the stories, using detail that supported the premise in the quotation. Analysis of Joyce's style included use of descriptive language, narrative structure and characterisation. Some excellent use of contextual detail was seen in the best answers.
- (b) This question was less popular than (a) with very few answers seen. Candidates were required to analyse the effects of a passage from *A Mother*. Less successful answers struggled to move beyond character sketches of the Kearneys and Mr Holohan. Some drifted into general reflections on the paralysis of Dublin life, a theme common in answers. Only one or two responses were able to produce a coherent treatment of Joyce's methods and concerns here and in the wider text.

Question 10

JACKIE KAY: Selected Poems from *Darling*

- (a) This question attracted several answers but was not as popular as (b). Candidates were asked to discuss some of the ways Kay presents conflict in three poems from the selection. Poems chosen by candidates included *My Grandmother*, *Dressing Up*, *Going to See King Lear*, *Compound Fracture*, *Teeth* and *Gambia*. Answers working at the lower end of the mark range offered partial knowledge of the poems and some understanding of Kay's concerns, applied to the task. Family conflict was explored in terms of social expectations, child violence, racism, mental cruelty, physical abuse and sexuality. There was a little engagement with Kay's use of language, but other poetic methods were not dealt with in detail. Some very well executed responses were seen that made sensitive and perceptive explorations of Kay's presentation of different kinds of conflict. These answers developed interesting views of alternative interpretations and considered poetic voice, foreshadowing and irony in their tightly focused analysis.
- (b) This question was more popular than the (a) option with candidates engaging enthusiastically with the poem *Going to See King Lear*. Links were made to *Compound Fracture*, *Brendan Gallacher*,

False Memory and *Childhood, Still*. Analysis of the use of the child's perspective tended to be well done with effective personal response in criticism of the mother's insensitivity implied in the language of self-indulgence and elation. Personal reflection tended to be thoughtful and explored irresponsible parenting and subjecting children to traumatic experiences. The best answers considered examples of how Kay presents the child's experience using simple language, imagery such as the chocolate raisins, and manipulation of enjambment and caesura. Some reflected on the irony in the mother's intense pleasure at the blinding of Gloucester. Some identified the unconscious blindness of the mother failing to realise her daughter's distress. A few were able to recognise the links between the child poet and the adult Jackie Kay implicit in the final lines. Weaker responses compared poems looking at events and commenting personally on them.

Question 11

JEAN RHYS: *Wide Sargasso Sea*

- (a) This text attracted a few responses with answers roughly equal between the questions. This question required candidates to consider how Rhys presents racial tensions in the novel. Examiners reported some thoughtful discussion of context and reference to Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Jamaica's freedom from colonial rule. More able candidates were able to give details of racial tensions with one effectively considering how 'Rhys explores the ambiguities and uncertainties of memory, history and truth following the abolition of slavery'. Strongly structured answers began with Antoinette's childhood and background followed by consideration of her husband's treatment of her and his attitude to her country, linking points closely to contextual details. Reference was made to Antoinette's 'othering' in England, including the changing of her name to an English one as well as symbolism and foreshadowing. Understanding of Antoinette's experiences of racism in some answers included comments on how Mr Mason's reaction to the warnings revealed his ignorance and arrogance. Less successful answers lacked detailed knowledge, and this compromised their capacity for analysis and personal argument. Some became confused about different characters and their roles.
- (b) This question required candidates to analyse an extract from Part 2 of the novel. On the whole this question was done less well than (a) with candidates struggling to access the balanced perspective on offer in the passage. Many took one side, usually that of the male protagonist, and selected evidence to support his view or paraphrased it. General comments on Rhys's use of dreams and setting were seen but there was little close analysis of the detail of language. References to burning were developed in a few answers. Some attempted to explore the significance of the moth with variable success. Most candidates were unable to clearly link the passage to the wider text. Better answers took a view that recognised the 'clash of cultures and backgrounds which would lead to the disastrous end of [Antoinette's] life' and demonstrated engagement with Rhys's use of characterisation and description to create atmosphere and tension.

Question 12

STEPHEN SPENDER: *Selected Poems*

- (a) Too few responses were seen to comment.
- (b) A fair number of answers were seen to this question which required candidates to write a critical appreciation of Spender's poem VIII. Most candidates struggled to engage with analysis of language beyond a basic or straightforward level, tending to spot features without accompanying analysis. Very few grasped the conflict between egotism and alienation in the poem, both in terms of language and theme. Many appeared to treat VIII as an unseen text, though some demonstrated awareness of Spender's social and political views, linking these to the context of the poet's private life. Confusion was evident in many answers. Some attempted to develop an argument that the poem is about war or sexual confusion or friendship with very few really getting to grips with the poem's meaning.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/42
Pre- and Post-1900 Poetry and Prose

Key messages

- Successful responses focus on how to convey ideas about literature clearly, developing ideas in a relevant and appropriate structure.
- The opinions and interpretations of others should be closely linked to the question asked and should connect with the candidate's arguments.
- Candidates should ensure that examination time is used strategically to address questions equally.
- Successful responses make good use of specific examples. This relates to selection of quotations and references and also aspects of context.

General comments

Clear enthusiasm and engagement was shown by most candidates in terms of the texts studied. Personal exploration of ideas, themes and concerns were often lively, with some confidence in analysis and evaluation of effects. This was evident across the ability range and confirmed that candidates have gained a great deal of insight and enjoyment from their reading and study of the novels and poets.

Unfortunately, there were some rubric infringements, where candidates wrote about either two prose or two poetry texts or wrote about two texts from the same time period. In addition, this series there were a significant number only offering one answer, often of modest length. It is strongly advised that teachers and leaders in centres check that the texts selected for study meet the requirements of the specification.

The knowledge and understanding demonstrated by candidates working at the top levels was wide ranging and focused closely on the question. Candidates benefited greatly from the confidence that results in deep knowledge of the texts and this underpins their arguments and development of points. The skill of directing knowledge and understanding to meet the demands of a particular question in exam conditions is one deployed to good effect in the best answers. Candidates in the middle levels of the mark range often showed secure knowledge and understanding but tended to be less consistent in its use and delivery. These candidates shifted away from the relevant focus, exploring one point too rigorously, perhaps repeating aspects, to the detriment of a broader argument. Candidates working in the lower levels of the mark scheme often used their knowledge and understanding in a narrative manner, missing opportunities to develop arguments and personal responses. Quotations not only support arguments, but also enable candidates to develop their analysis. Some candidates used very long quotations or detached them entirely from paragraphs. This is not a helpful approach, limiting the candidate's ability to show evidence of analysis. The best answers use short, embedded quotations as part of their argument, integrating with relevance and comment. Quotations that are used with little reason or comment do not enable secure discussion. When writing about a given poem, some more successful responses made effective and relevant reference to the characteristic methods of the poet, referring to specific details of other works. Less successful answers either did not mention the wider work of the poet at all or simply referred to titles of other poems.

Some excellent and very sophisticated analysis was seen in answers at the top end of the mark range. The best analysis was interleaved with knowledge, personal understanding and contextual awareness, resulting in original and thought-provoking discussions. It is creditable when complex literary techniques and metalanguage are used deliberately and accurately to exemplify a point, but some candidates are using rare and advanced terminology inappropriately or without explanation. The least successful analysis listed techniques in a sentence without exemplification (feature spotting) or offered general comments such as 'The writer uses metaphors, alliteration, onomatopoeia and rhyme in their poetry.' This tells the examiner nothing about the candidate's ability to understand and interrogate the effects of text.

The clarity, structure and register of answers was commented upon by examiners this year. Candidates, having read and understood a text, respond to it through written form and it is important that they optimise the success of their arguments in their written response. Planning strategically, no matter what form this plan might take is essential in ensuring a cohesive and relevant response. Plans do not have to take a long time to create and should be personal to the candidate's style. These almost always keep the candidate on track and contribute to a focused approach in the examination time. Planning also helps candidates achieve balance across the two answers. Examiners noted that a significant number of candidates were writing a good deal more on one answer to the detriment of the second, perhaps favouring one text over another. This is not helpful as a strong first answer cannot reasonably compensate for a brief or unfinished second answer. As questions are equally weighted, candidates are strongly advised to spend half the time on each of the two questions. Leaving a small amount of time for editing is advisable and can make a difference to marks as mistakes are corrected and ideas clarified during the process. The best candidates balance their time and prioritise their points to shape their answers. Sometimes examiners see an approach of writing a general introduction which does not necessarily explain the direction for the essay, and a conclusion which is virtually the same as the introduction. Examiners recognise that the time limitations within the examination room mean that an exam essay cannot be structured as neatly as an essay done for homework. Having said this, it is still advisable to frame their argument with a strategic direction or thesis statement in the introduction, however brief. The body of the essay should lead to a conclusion that reflects the journey of the argument, rather than a repeated summary of the introduction. Some successful answers feature concluding paragraphs that summarise a personal view, sometimes supported with a reference to another opinion or interpretation. One note to impress upon candidates is the importance of recording the correct question number at the start of their answer. This enables a clear view of the focus chosen and leaves the examiner in no doubt about which question is being attempted.

Personal response was often a strength of answers at all levels of ability. The best answers offered original and thought-provoking responses, carefully linking points to the focus of the chosen question and to details of the extract in **(b)** questions. Engagement was often lively and perceptive. Work reaching the middle range of achievement often opened interesting personal responses without developing or supporting these ideas, thus limiting their impact. Examiners reported seeing some examples of speculation or reflections of personal experience which lost focus on textual detail and concepts.

The application of knowledge and understanding of context varies considerably amongst candidates with some offering entirely erroneous comments that undermine the value of their answers and others offering biographical details about a writer that are not relevant to the question being asked. **(b)** questions require candidates to demonstrate awareness of where the extract falls in the wider work. In terms of poetry, it is a requirement to contextualise the poem within the poet's wider work with reference to details of the collection and characteristic features. Several examiners have reported seeing essays about poems that appear to be approached as unseen material. This does not meet the requirements of the specification. Context informs reading of a text and may include references to literary, social, historical or cultural aspects. Where candidates use context, this should support relevant arguments linked to the question, for example, using references to American Transcendentalism in relation to aspects of Emily Dickinson's style and concerns, and exploring the possible influence of the Puritan revival on the poet's views of death. Including details of Dickinson's date of birth and hometown in isolation do not constitute contextual reference but were seen regularly by examiners. The best context appears seamlessly as part of a coherent argument.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Pre-1900 Poetry and Prose

Question 1

JANE AUSTEN: *Persuasion*

- (a)** This question required candidates to discuss Austen's presentation of Captain Wentworth in response to a given quotation. It attracted a reasonable number of responses, many of which were accomplished, achieving a rounded understanding and assessment of Wentworth's character and how this is developed in the novel. Some strong personal responses explored Wentworth's shallowness in preferring Louisa and Henrietta to Anne, noting that this was disappointing but essential to the novel's narrative. There were some convincing arguments for Wentworth as a static character who is dependent on Anne's fluidity and capacity for change in order to find his own fulfilment. Examiners reported seeing clear and often sophisticated appreciation of the relationship between Anne and Wentworth in the context of other characters around them. The best answers

focused on the final phrase of the quotation, 'excepting Anne Elliot', finding evidence to argue that he always had her on his mind, both through acts of kindness and jealousy. Analysis focused on aspects such as characterisation, narrative arc and voice, although there were only a few references to free indirect discourse and Austen reveals only Anne's thoughts and experiences rather than Wentworth's until the end of the novel.

- (b) As with (a) candidates tended to perform well in response to the passage from Volume 1, Chapter 5 of the novel. Close reading of text supported relevant arguments in most answers seen. Some less successful answers tended to be too dependent on plot-driven discussion and contextual exposition, resulting in patchy treatment of the extract. Better answers interpreted Austen's presentation of Anne and Elizabeth in terms of satire, social status and morality. They used Lady Russell's perspective to strengthen Anne's concerns, found evidence for Anne's good judgement and determination to do the right thing in warning her sister, and then focused on Elizabeth's arrogance and superficiality in sticking stubbornly to her own opinions. Few alluded to the wider text except to link Elizabeth's vanity with her father's. There was acknowledgement of Anne's low expectation of making an impression on Elizabeth, showing her intelligent understanding of her sister, yet realising that her words may have some influence in the future. Some answers demonstrated awareness of free indirect discourse showing us Anne's inner thoughts but there was little attention to the shift in narrative perspective from a neutral, third person in the first paragraph to a closer insight into Anne's thoughts for the rest of the passage.

Question 2

GEOFFREY CHAUCER: *The Merchant's Prologue and Tale*

- (a) A few responses were seen to this question that required candidates to consider in what ways and with what effects Chaucer presents male attitudes to marriage in the text. Most responses performed well with candidates understanding the ways in which Chaucer demystifies marriage and reduces it to the demands of instinct. Essays tended to be well-argued and well-constructed with other interpretations effectively explored. These included Marxist and feminist readings alongside aspects of historical context. Knowledge of the text tended to be at least sound with reference to details of the Merchant's own experience of marriage and religious and classical references such as the dramatised debate with Justinus on the risks of an old man taking a younger wife. Candidates clearly enjoyed study of the text with many employing lively personal arguments, for example in consideration of the levels of irony within the tale. The viewpoint of the Merchant was considered in respect of his woeful marriage problems with some mention of the eager-to-please Placebo and May's flippant and materialistic attitude. Analysis explored the impact of religious imagery used by Januarie on a contemporary reader as well as a modern one.
- (b) This question was less popular than (a) with very few responses seen. Candidates were required to discuss an extract, showing what it adds to the presentation of May in the tale. Responses seen tended to be sound or better. Candidates considered the irony of Chaucer's presentation and significance of patriarchal attitudes. Arguments were related to the wider context of the tale, considering the relationships between May and Januarie and Damyan. Candidates considered the paradoxes of young and old, fair and unattractive with some insightful analysis of Chaucer's use of language and contrast in the extract.

Question 3

EMILY DICKINSON: Selected Poems

- (a) This proved to be a very popular text with the (b) question favoured by candidates. However, a good number of answers were seen to this question which focused on the Dickinson's presentation of grief in three poems from the collection. Popular choices of poem included *I can wade Grief –*, *I measure every Grief I meet*, *I felt a Funeral, in my Brain* and *As Imperceptibly as Grief*. The full ability range was seen across the answers with less able candidates struggling to explain how attitudes to grief are explored, veering instead into a focus on death. Answers reflecting work at Level 4 and above were able to use effective knowledge of the poems, offering some sensitive discussion on Dickinson's multi-layered attitudes to grief. Analysis included consideration of personification, and the use of dashes and capitalisation. Selection of language focused largely on the misery of grief, but some answers made interesting and original comments on Dickinson's apparent abstraction at times, 'seen dispassionately and calmly, reflecting Emily as a watcher of grief as well as a sufferer'. Some answers commented on the use of first-person voice relating to

personal experience of grief. One thoughtful insight considered how for 'Emily grief seems easier to deal with than happiness'.

- (b) This was the most popular question on **Section A** of this paper. The question required candidates to analyse the poem *I dreaded that first Robin, so,*. The full ability range was seen with some logical approaches that looked at the passage of time and the contrast between springtime and the speaker's own mood and feelings. Candidates selected language such as the harshness of 'shout', 'mangle' and 'pierce' and recognition of the shift in tone to acceptance or resignation in line 21. Nearly all recognised the robin as a symbol for spring or hope or change. Some explored the peculiarity of 'pianos in the woods'. More successful answers focused on the 'deliberate shock' of the opening of the poem, which challenges the reader's expectation. Some excellent answers were seen where candidates developed their arguments beyond fear of the season of spring to fear of all change and transition. Wider reference to other poems from the collection was less evident on this question than on other questions on Dickinson but links were seen to *A Murmur in the Trees*, *"Hope" is the thing with feathers –*, *This World is not Conclusion* and *A Bird came down the Walk*. Less successful answers could sometimes explain the religious references in the poem but struggled to integrate the ending into their discussions of nature.

Question 4

JOHN DONNE: Selected Poems

- (a) Too few responses were seen to comment.
- (b) This question attracted a small number of responses. It required candidates to analyse the poem, *The Bait*. Answers tended to be good or weak with little achievement seen in the middle of the mark range. It is fair to say that many candidates found Donne's work to be challenging. Some less confident candidates struggled to understand the poem and wrote about it on a literal level that led inevitably to confusion and lack of development. Others attempted to explore the central metaphor related to fishing, but lost cohesion as they tried to make interpretations fit together. Informed responses placed the poem within the context of Donne's attitudes to love and women contrasting the tone of the opening with the wry self-depreciation of the ending. They also compared the working through of the fish image with the use of the flea and compass elsewhere. Critical comments were well used for the most part and integrated closely into relevant arguments. Weaker answers made little or no reference to other poems in the collection, but better engagement saw reference to work such as *Holy Sonnets* and *The Sun Rising*.

Question 5

THOMAS HARDY: *Far from the Madding Crowd*

- (a) A few answers were seen to this question that required candidates to compare and contrast Hardy's presentation of Bathsheba's relationships with Boldwood and Troy. Knowledge was largely sound with weaker answers tending to summarise narratives and explore the actions and words of characters. These answers tended to miss opportunities to analyse narrative methods, use of imagery and characterisation. Better answers used the contrast in character to build insightful arguments linked to focused personal arguments such as the idea that Bathsheba is 'dazzled by Troy'. References to context and use of apposite, integrated quotation enabled the construction of some strong and knowledgeable answers.
- (b) Too few responses were seen to comment.

Question 6

BRAM STOKER: *Dracula*

- (a) This question required candidates to explore Stoker's presentation of Jonathan's relationship with Mina. Several answers were seen, mostly in the middle of the mark range. Responses tended to take the view that the relationship was a virtuous one and that Mina and Jonathan are ordinary people in love in the midst of a 'gothic horror'. Some expressed arguments about their love enabling them to resist and fight against the forces of darkness embodied by Dracula. Some candidates commented on Stoker's presentation of Mina as a conventional Victorian wife with 'one foot in the new age', contrasting her with Lucy. Analysis of Stoker's narrative style and use of voice

was evident but beyond this there was little reference to writer's methods and effects. Some took the view of a subversion of stereotypical roles with Harker trapped in the castle and Mina fighting against possession by Dracula. Ideas tended to be insightful with a lack of detailed support to illustrate them.

- (b) This answer was similar in popularity to (a). It required candidates to analyse ways in which Stoker creates a sense of horror in a passage from Chapter 19. Good answers recognised Stoker's method of letting the reader know more than the victim. The tendency to rationalise supernatural events was recognised as Mina assumes her vision of Dracula has been a dream, but the reader is aware of the significance of the fog coming in through the door and the red light as well as Mina's unusual tiredness. Some excellent answers discussed Stoker's use of the imagery of horror and the supernatural to at first unsettle and then terrify the reader. These were often linked to other episodes in the novel where Stoker builds tension that turns to terror. Less successful answers offered narrative or paraphrased responses to the passage and a general sense of context without any attempt to link ideas to effects.

Section B: Post-1900 Poetry and Prose

Question 7

MARGARET ATTWOOD: *The Handmaid's Tale*

- (a) This was the most popular text on **Section B** of the paper but the (b) question was more popular than (a). This question required candidates to consider how Atwood presents different attitudes to love in the novel. Most focused on Offred's memories of Luke (and some on her child) and her relationships with the Commander and Nick with some considering the presentation of Serena Joy and the Commander. Knowledge tended to be at least straightforward with better answers considering the impact of the unreliable narrator. Details included the Scrabble game, the episode at Jezebel's, the Ceremony and the Birthing day with some arguments concluding that Gilead sees no place for love in its society. A couple of excellent answers explored the complex relationships between men and women and women and women, exploring how these are manipulated through a dystopian lens. The least successful answers were overwhelmingly narrative accounts of the plot with opportunities missed for discussion of Atwood's use of perspective and language.
- (b) This was a very popular question and answers were seen at all levels of ability. Many were extremely well done and the passage from Chapter 33 offered extensive opportunities to discuss their knowledge and understanding of hierarchies within Gilead and how these impacted the experience of the individual handmaid. These accomplished responses often extended their remit novel-wide to discuss the institutionalised oppression of the Gileadean system. The public nature of the event was noted in a number of answers with some good discussions of how 'feminism is being used by the totalitarian male regime'. Most candidates were secure in terms of the context of the passage and made confident links to the wider text such as Gilead's design and use of mass ceremonies as a means of reinforcing its power and the lowly position of the Handmaids in the hierarchy. Some referred back to the scene in the Red Centre when the Handmaids are made to chant to Janine that her rape is her fault. The handmaids' using the opportunity for another small rebellion was noted, in their gossiping, and the fact that the television cameras prevented any dire scenes of punishment. Less successful responses tended to adopt an explanatory or narrative summary approach, covering attitudes to the Wives, the colour coding, the role of Ofglen and the history of Offred's relationship with Janine.

Question 8

SUJATA BHATT: Selected Poems from *Point No Point*

- (a) Too few responses were seen to comment.
- (b) Several responses were seen to this question that asked candidates to write a critical appreciation of the poem *Eurydice Speaks*. Knowledge and understanding of the poem proved sketchy across the answers seen with evidence of the poem being treated as an 'unseen' text by some candidates and clear errors such as an assumption that Eurydice was a man. The best answers understood the context of the poem fully and referred to the myth, arguing that this is Eurydice's chance to speak for herself, having been overshadowed by the ostentatious Orpheus. Observations of the natural world were discussed and the 'quiet man who listens' with some excellent analysis of poetic

effects that reveal the narrator's emotional state and how this relates to environment. Some candidates drew attention to the point that, in comparison to Eurydice's desire to be connected, Orpheus's monologue is written in the past tense and is full of images of disconnection and concerns about himself.

Question 9

JAMES JOYCE: *Dubliners*

- (a) Too few responses were seen to comment.
- (b) A few answers were seen to this question which asked candidates to analyse the effects of a passage from *The Sisters*. Some answers were able to place the passage within the wider structure of the collection and discuss the use of a youthful narrator struggling to make sense of his experience, both of the unfinished sentences and his relationship with the priest. In responses working at Level 4 and above there was evidence of close reading in the tracking and analysis of the boy's anger and the upsetting images in the dream. There was however little attempt to link the passage to the rest of the story or to wider concerns such as the idea of paralysis, the presentation of relationships between young people and their elders, the role of gossip, and the presentation of priests. Analysis of dialogue and characterisation were well done in the best answers.

Question 10

JACKIE KAY: Selected Poems from *Darling*

- (a) Too few responses were seen to comment.
- (b) This question required candidates to write a critical appreciation of the poem *Blues*. Responses were seen across the ability range and a reasonable number were seen. Some struggled to place the poem in terms of context or theme with some suggesting that the poem was about a woman who worked as a plantation slave. Some focused entirely on racial prejudice seemingly unaware of references to domestic violence, attributing the stares of other people just to her colour. The covering up of her misery with jokes and laughter was understood, with comment on the short sentences and the 'trembling mirror'. The 'laugh that could build a raft' was seen as a sign of hope that she might escape. There were few attempts to explore poetic effects with some reference to alliteration and the use of voice. Links were made to *Compound Fracture*, *Even the trees* and *Gambia*. Some very good answers were seen that skilfully cross-referenced slavery, music, domestic abuse, racial violence and Bessie Smith.

Question 11

JEAN RHYS: *Wide Sargasso Sea*

- (a) This text attracted a reasonable number of answers with (b) proving slightly more popular than (a). This question required candidates to discuss Rhys's presentation of Antoinette in the light of a quotation: 'A portrait of a woman struggling for identity.' Answers tended to agree with the quotation. This question was done quite well with most candidates showing at least competent knowledge of the character. References were made to the racial problems in Antoinette's youth after the abolition of slavery. 'White cockroach' was often quoted and there was exploration of how Antoinette's relationship with her husband makes matters worse for her, especially when she is taken to England and re-named Bertha. Some successful arguments considered her marriage and role in the context of her culture including voodoo elements, and how she is a 'victim of those who control her in order to control her money'.
- (b) This question required candidates to analyse the effects of the writing in a passage from Part 2. Most candidates could explain the context of the passage and its significance in terms of the plot referring to Antoinette's plea to Christophine for obeah to make her husband love her again, Christophine's warning that it would not work and the consequences of its failure. The most successful answers commented on the effect of the narrative perspective, noticing how Antoinette's husband was experiencing the culmination of a process of alienation. His sexual union with Amelie immediately afterwards was interpreted as a typical colonial assertion of his manhood after the painful humiliation of being rendered so physically weak. Candidates examined some aspects of the language used to describe his physical sensations and confusion, commenting on various

examples of the unnaturalness as well as his intense description of Antoinette which deepened his hatred of her. Some responses looked for evidence before the passage of his ambivalence toward Antoinette and afterwards of his further determination to hate and break her. His new-found sense of purpose was felt to be expressed in his ability to avoid the natural obstacles on his path back to the house. Most candidates saw that this scene marked the end of any meaningful relationship with Antoinette.

Question 12

STEPHEN SPENDER: Selected Poems

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

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/43
Pre- and Post-1900 Poetry and Prose

Key messages

- Successful responses focus on how to convey ideas about literature clearly, developing ideas in a relevant and appropriate structure.
- The opinions and interpretations of others should be closely linked to the question asked and should connect with the candidate's arguments.
- Candidates should ensure that examination time is used strategically to address questions equally.
- Successful responses make good use of specific examples. This relates to selection of quotations and references and also aspects of context.

General comments

Clear enthusiasm and engagement was shown by most candidates in terms of the texts studied. Personal exploration of ideas, themes and concerns were often lively, with some confidence in analysis and evaluation of effects. This was evident across the ability range and confirmed that candidates have gained a great deal of insight and enjoyment from their reading and study of the novels and poets.

Unfortunately, there were some rubric infringements, where candidates wrote about either two prose or two poetry texts or wrote about two texts from the same time period. In addition, this series there were a significant number only offering one answer, often of modest length. It is strongly advised that teachers and leaders in centres check that the texts selected for study meet the requirements of the specification.

The knowledge and understanding demonstrated by candidates working at the top levels was wide ranging and focused closely on the question. Candidates benefited greatly from the confidence that results in deep knowledge of the texts and this underpins their arguments and development of points. The skill of directing knowledge and understanding to meet the demands of a particular question in exam conditions is one deployed to good effect in the best answers. Candidates in the middle levels of the mark range often showed secure knowledge and understanding but tended to be less consistent in its use and delivery. These candidates shifted away from the relevant focus, exploring one point too rigorously, perhaps repeating aspects, to the detriment of a broader argument. Candidates working in the lower levels of the mark scheme often used their knowledge and understanding in a narrative manner, missing opportunities to develop arguments and personal responses. Quotations not only support arguments, but also enable candidates to develop their analysis. Some candidates used very long quotations or detached them entirely from paragraphs. This is not a helpful approach, limiting the candidate's ability to show evidence of analysis. The best answers use short, embedded quotations as part of their argument, integrating with relevance and comment. Quotations that are used with little reason or comment do not enable secure discussion. When writing about a given poem, some more successful responses made effective and relevant reference to the characteristic methods of the poet, referring to specific details of other works. Less successful answers either did not mention the wider work of the poet at all or simply referred to titles of other poems.

Some excellent and very sophisticated analysis was seen in answers at the top end of the mark range. The best analysis was interleaved with knowledge, personal understanding and contextual awareness, resulting in original and thought-provoking discussions. It is creditable when complex literary techniques and metalanguage are used deliberately and accurately to exemplify a point, but some candidates are using rare and advanced terminology inappropriately or without explanation. The least successful analysis listed techniques in a sentence without exemplification (feature spotting) or offered general comments such as 'The writer uses metaphors, alliteration, onomatopoeia and rhyme in their poetry.' This tells the examiner nothing about the candidate's ability to understand and interrogate the effects of text.

The clarity, structure and register of answers was commented upon by examiners this year. Candidates, having read and understood a text, respond to it through written form and it is important that they optimise the success of their arguments in their written response. Planning strategically, no matter what form this plan might take is essential in ensuring a cohesive and relevant response. Plans do not have to take a long time to create and should be personal to the candidate's style. These almost always keep the candidate on track and contribute to a focused approach in the examination time. Planning also helps candidates achieve balance across the two answers. Examiners noted that a significant number of candidates were writing a good deal more on one answer to the detriment of the second, perhaps favouring one text over another. This is not helpful as a strong first answer cannot reasonably compensate for a brief or unfinished second answer. As questions are equally weighted, candidates are strongly advised to spend half the time on each of the two questions. Leaving a small amount of time for editing is advisable and can make a difference to marks as mistakes are corrected and ideas clarified during the process. The best candidates balance their time and prioritise their points to shape their answers. Sometimes examiners see an approach of writing a general introduction which does not necessarily explain the direction for the essay, and a conclusion which is virtually the same as the introduction. Examiners recognise that the time limitations within the examination room mean that an exam essay cannot be structured as neatly as an essay done for homework. Having said this, it is still advisable to frame their argument with a strategic direction or thesis statement in the introduction, however brief. The body of the essay should lead to a conclusion that reflects the journey of the argument, rather than a repeated summary of the introduction. Some successful answers feature concluding paragraphs that summarise a personal view, sometimes supported with a reference to another opinion or interpretation. One note to impress upon candidates is the importance of recording the correct question number at the start of their answer. This enables a clear view of the focus chosen and leaves the examiner in no doubt about which question is being attempted.

Personal response was often a strength of answers at all levels of ability. The best answers offered original and thought-provoking responses, carefully linking points to the focus of the chosen question and to details of the extract in **(b)** questions. Engagement was often lively and perceptive. Work reaching the middle range of achievement often opened interesting personal responses without developing or supporting these ideas, thus limiting their impact. Examiners reported seeing some examples of speculation or reflections of personal experience which lost focus on textual detail and concepts.

The application of knowledge and understanding of context varies considerably amongst candidates with some offering entirely erroneous comments that undermine the value of their answers and others offering biographical details about a writer that are not relevant to the question being asked. **(b)** questions require candidates to demonstrate awareness of where the extract falls in the wider work. In terms of poetry, it is a requirement to contextualise the poem within the poet's wider work with reference to details of the collection and characteristic features. Several examiners have reported seeing essays about poems that appear to be approached as unseen material. This does not meet the requirements of the specification. Context informs reading of a text and may include references to literary, social, historical or cultural aspects. Where candidates use context, this should support relevant arguments linked to the question, for example, using references to American Transcendentalism in relation to aspects of Emily Dickinson's style and concerns, and exploring the possible influence of the Puritan revival on the poet's views of death. Including details of Dickinson's date of birth and hometown in isolation do not constitute contextual reference but were seen regularly by examiners. The best context appears seamlessly as part of a coherent argument.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Pre-1900 Poetry and Prose

Question 1

JANE AUSTEN: *Persuasion*

- (a)** Very few responses were seen to this question which required candidates to discuss some of the attitudes created by Austen's exploration of different attitudes to love. Responses seen tended to be straightforward and descriptive in approach, offering simple summaries of various relationships based on the premise that it was unusual to marry for love in the Augustan period. The marriage of the Crofts was cited as happy while Charles Musgrove marrying Mary when he had really loved Anne was seen as very unfortunate for him. Mrs Clay's attempts to snare Sir Walter and Mr Elliot's courtship of Anne were also mentioned.
- (b)** Too few responses were seen to comment.

Question 2

GEOFFREY CHAUCER: *The Merchant's Prologue and Tale*

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

Question 3

EMILY DICKINSON: Selected Poems

- (a) This text was the most popular on **Section A** of this paper and the **(b)** question was more popular than **(a)**. Candidates were required to discuss some of the effects created by Dickinson's presentation of strong emotions in three poems from the selection. Answers seen tended to be strong and focus was largely on emotions of despair and grief. Poems used included *I can Wade Grief –*, *There's a certain Slant of light*, and *After great pain, a formal feeling comes –*. Analysis of structure focused on the ballad form, slant rhyme and use of irregular meter relating these features to the universality of grief and the commonality of human experience. Exploration of imagery informed well focused argument and personal response, for example reference to 'pools' of grief. Less successful answers drifted from relevant discussion to the theme of death which some linked to with partial relevance to the strong emotions of loss or grief. Some candidates related their comments to Dickinson's critics and personal relationships with variable security.
- (b) This question required candidates to discuss Dickinson's presentation of the world around her in *What mystery pervades a well!* Virtually all answers interpreted the phrase 'world around her' to mean nature which worked well but other possibilities could include society and imagination, particularly considering the focus of the last stanza. The best responses presented accomplished discussions of Dickinson's sense of unease in confronting nature and its mystery with some references to the supernatural. One answer saw the eeriness in 'a neighbor from another world' and connected to the 'haunted house' and 'ghost'. Most answers lay within the middle of the mark range with some opportunities missed to develop personal responses. Personification was considered, for example with reference to the line 'The grass does not appear afraid' with some answers referring to other poems where nature is personified such as *A still – Volcano – Life*. Other opinions and alternative interpretations did not feature strongly in these answers, and this may have held some candidates back from fully appreciating the nuances of the poem.

Question 4

JOHN DONNE: Selected Poems

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

Question 5

THOMAS HARDY: *Far from the Madding Crowd*

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

Question 6

BRAM STOKER: *Dracula*

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

Section B: Post-1900 Poetry and Prose

Question 7

MARGARET ATTWOOD: *The Handmaid's Tale*

- (a) This text was the most popular on the paper, but more candidates answered on the (b) question than (a). The question required candidates to write about Atwood's presentation of rituals in the novel. Answers tended to be in the lower and middle mark ranges with most focusing on the significance of the Ceremony and how it is used to confirm the authoritarian power in Gilead. Some explored the irony of the Ceremony being a clinical and cold experience, a subversion of the belief and feeling involved in many rituals. One interesting answer focused on how Offred and the other handmaids rely on small rituals such as daily walks and the use of butter as moisturiser. Context was well managed with reference to modern rituals in society. One answer linked the western trend for 'baby showers' with the Ceremony, exploring ways in which fertility is recognised in different societies.
- (b) This was by far the most popular question on the paper. Candidates were asked to analyse the effects of the writing in a passage from Chapter 23. Most answers identified the obvious points from the extract and were able to contextualise, suggesting that Offred is in danger and commenting on her place in the hierarchy of Gilead. Some personal responses reflected that Offred is more like a child in this passage and the Commander like a father with language used to support this view including 'cotton candy', 'bow under my chin' and 'peppermint'. The best answers considered the overall tone of the passage and how it fits into the reader's view of Offred's relationship with the Commander. Some interesting points were made about the dialogue, the Scrabble words and some of the sexualised language with one personal response suggesting that Offred needs sex in order to feel some control over the situation. Only the best answers understood the transactional value of the game in Offred's eyes. The comic progression in her reaction to the scrabble game from 'once the game of old women, old men' to 'it's as if he's offered me drugs' was not fully appreciated. Wider reference was largely restricted to the trip to Jezebel's.

Question 8

SUJATA BHATT: Selected Poems from *Point No Point*

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

Question 9

JAMES JOYCE: *Dubliners*

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

Question 10

JACKIE KAY: Selected Poems from *Darling*

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

Question 11

JEAN RHYS: *Wide Sargasso Sea*

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

Question 12

STEPHEN SPENDER: Selected Poems

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