LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/11
Drama and Poetry

Key messages

1. Learners should select relevant material from the whole text and avoid lengthy narrative summaries.
2. Answers to poetry passage questions should start with a focused introduction to avoid unstructured feature spotting.

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, occurring most often because the learner had attempted more than the stipulated two questions. A few learners did appear to have time problems, so that the second essay was either rushed or incomplete. The vast majority of learners followed the rubric accurately and with a clear balance between the two answers. All but a few candidates were able to show at least a basic knowledge of their chosen texts and many learners showed evidence of a real engagement with them.

There are two general issues to address this session:

1. Many learners in this session included in their essays long, narrative summaries or descriptions of only generally relevant parts of their chosen text. This was apparent in answers on discursive **(a)** questions as well as passage **(b)** questions. For example, answers to either optional question on *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* often included a detailed summary of the relationship between Brick, Maggie and Skipper, irrespective of its usefulness to their response to the actual question. Learners should be encouraged to select carefully from the whole text the most relevant material to enable them to address all aspects of the task, perhaps as part of their essay planning process
2. A number of option **(b)** essays on the poetry texts in this session started without any consideration of the terms of the question or in some cases any summative general introduction at all, choosing to start by listing the poetic features they had spotted in the poem. These essays often became a series of statements along the lines of 'The poet also uses enjambement', with some exemplification from the poem, before moving onto the next poetic feature. Candidates are advised to analyse their chosen examples, linking them directly to the actual task and/or their interpretation of the poem. Without this, the statements remain a list of poetic methods, which does not fully answer the question, and therefore cannot go beyond a basic level of achievement.

   Learners should be encouraged to use their introductions to set out generally their interpretation of both poem and question as a framework on which their analysis of the poetic methods can be structured.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Drama

Question 1

ERROL JOHN: *Moon on a Rainbow Shawl*

(a) This was a minority choice in this session. Nearly every response selected relevant material from the text with which to address the task. Weaker answers often summarised the work of each character in turn, with Epf and Sophia the usual focus, though their differing attitudes were only implicitly considered. Better answers at this level also considered a wider range of characters and

were able to discriminate between those 'in acceptable employment such as Epf' and those 'who did what was necessary to survive, such as Mavis', as one answer suggested. More competent answers discussed how John 'used work as a method of characterisation', with Epf's attitude to his driving often discussed in detail. Answers at this level were able to compare characters' attitudes as a way of structuring their essays. 'Rosa becomes more like Mavis in seizing opportunities as the play progresses', as one essay suggested. Better answers developed such ideas to include Sophia's 'grumbling acceptance of her situation', while other essays explored John's presentation of the different attitudes of men and women more generally. Good answers developed such arguments with detailed and apposite references to the text, often with perceptive insight into the effects of specific moments, such as the dialogue between Epf and Esther about education, or how 'Charlie's treatment as a cricketer led to him stealing the money to give his daughter a better chance'. Where such ideas were supported by relevant use of contexts and analysis of some dramatic methods, the answers did well.

(b) This was the majority choice on this text. Most responses recognised this extract as part of the closing sequence of the play and were able to assess its significance in that context. Very weak answers were often unaware of the situation and had little knowledge of the relationship between Epf and Sophia, with consequent limitations in their personal views. Better answers at this level recognised the causes of the tension between them and those who understood the significance of Rosa's appearance at this point were able to develop arguments in a straightforward way. More competent answers considered John's methods of characterisation here, for example 'Epf's refusal of the promotion shows the audience that his determination to leave and get away from the island and Rosa is not going to change', as one essay suggested. Stronger responses also traced Ephraim's inner conflict through the way his behaviours fluctuate from 'tender concern for Charlie to angry outbursts about the baby', as one learner noted. These responses often emphasised his passive aggressive behaviours and determination to resist Sophia's impassioned plea to his better nature. They discussed the moment of Rosa's appearance and its moving implications.

Other sound answers explored the various strands of conflict in the extract, usually the relationships, though others discussed Esther's disappearance, Rosa's pregnancy and Charlie's arrest for robbery. Answers at this level nearly all had secure knowledge of the whole text and often sound contextual awareness, enabling them to fully support the opinions offered. Good answers looked closely at dramatic methods, exploring John's use of language, particularly the Trinidadian argot of the dialogue, with some also considering its effects on the audience. Other strong responses considered the stage directions, the setting and the use of dramatic action, 'all of which are used to ramp up the tension as we near the denouement', as one learner argued. Good answers, for example, analysed the symbolic rejection of the ten dollars as Sophia crushes it. This led very good responses into exploring 'the opposition between material values and those that prioritise relationships and responsibilities', as one learner argued and how 'this final confrontation pits those ideas against each other.' Very good answers considered the effects of the dramatic methods identified, supporting the analysis with specific quotation from the passage and referencing the wider text, most often the gentler moments in Rosa and Epf's relationship. There was only rarely any meaningful use of contextual material, though 'the post-war atmosphere of change and opportunity', was noted by some successful responses.

Question 2

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Measure for Measure*

This was a popular choice of text though the majority of learners chose the **(b)** essay option.

(a) Although the minority choice on this text, this was a relatively popular question overall. All but a few answers had sufficient knowledge of the text to address the task relevantly, with a wide range of opinions about Lucio's role and characterisation offered at all levels of achievement. For some learners he was a 'perfect example of the very corruption and wickedness that the Duke wanted Angelo to get rid of.' Other learners saw him as the 'bridge between the court and the people', whereas for a few learners he was 'the true hero, standing by Claudio, supporting Isabella and telling the Duke a few home truths he needed to hear'. Weaker answers tended to retell the events in which he was involved, often in detail and showing awareness of the depth and complexity of his characterisation, though with too little engagement with dramatic methods to develop their arguments. More competent answers developed points by considering his role, in terms of the plot

but also, in some answers, in terms of the ideas, particularly about morals and sex. Good answers were able to analyse some of the comic moments in which Lucio was involved, such as 'Verbal puns about diseases, physical comedy with Elbow and the Duke, his role as an ironic commentator and of course his actions in unmasking the Duke at the end', as one learner perceptively summarised it. Very good answers did explore the complexity of Shakespeare's presentation of Lucio, often with very detailed reference to and quotation from the text, with most answers recognising the ambivalence of his portrayal as 'foul-mouthed dissolute who nevertheless stands by his friend and an ironic commentator who was caught out by his inability to hold his peace', as one learner succinctly put it. Where such ideas were supported by contextual awareness as well as textual support, the responses did very well.

(b) This was the second most popular question in the drama section and learners were often fully engaged in the dramatic action and the high tension generated by the Duke's return to Vienna. Learners who had a secure knowledge of the context to this passage were well able to explore the various strands of irony and even, for some, comedy in gauging an audience's response to the extract. Some answers were tempted into too much contextual detail, particularly around the Angelo/Isabella part of the plot. Discussions about the Duke and his 'really unfathomable tormenting of Isabella at this late juncture in the action', as one put it, also led some learners into setting out too much background narrative. Other weaker answers were not always secure in some key details – Claudio was executed and Isabella pregnant by Angelo in a number of these answers. Better responses at this level did have at least a straightforward knowledge of the wider situation and often some awareness of the dramatic nature of the Duke's entrance. Competent answers deconstructed the situation, carefully identifying 'knowing who on the stage knew what is very significant to an audience's response', as one essay summarised it. This enabled some sound explorations of the irony of the Duke's words to Angelo, for example. Some learners analysed the shock of his 'Away with her', with many learners 'outraged at his treatment of her, knowing she believes her brother to be dead', as one learner put it. Good answers were able to tease out the strands of irony effectively here, developed from recognising that 'only the Duke and the audience know the full picture', as one essay stated. The dramatic action, the setting and the stage business of Isabella kneeling were all well explored, while other good responses wondered about Angelo's reactions as 'this all took place in public in front of the Duke'. Very good answers looked closely at the language, particularly the Duke's words to Angelo and Isabella's language in denouncing the deputy, with some able to link this effectively to other key moments, so that 'the violence of speech here is no surprise to the audience given her desire earlier to be stripped and whipped and her wish for more restraint in the nunnery when we first meet her', as one learner summarised it. Other very good answers explored Isabella's repeated use of 'justice', for example, and the effect of Angelo's use of the word, while for others her 'rhetorical flourishes and increasingly impassioned language all suggest that she is on the edge of reason', which 'makes the Duke's treatment of her even more strange', as one very good answer argued. The strongest answers always had an appropriate balance between the passage and its context and were able to suggest a multiplicity of possible responses, all supported by perceptive analysis of the dramatic methods and insightful awareness of their likely effects.

Question 3

JOHN WEBSTER: *The Duchess of Malfi*

(a) This was the least popular question of the drama section, with only a very few responses seen. Nearly every response was able to select relevant material with which to address the question. Weaker answers tended to summarise Bosola's part in the play's action, with only limited reference to the task. Better answers at this level were at least implicitly aware of the ambivalence of Webster's characterisation: 'A corrupt murderer who at the end still has a conscience', as one learner put it. More competent responses discussed how Webster uses Bosola 'as a means of developing the plot', so that for some learners his 'sudden penitence is simply a structural device to bring vengeance onto the Aragonian brothers', as one essay suggested. Good answers developed such ideas by exploring his characterisation, noting how Antonio's comment 'works in reverse as it is only at the end his goodness is revealed.' Very good answers explored Webster's dramatic methods well, usually with some good analysis of his language, but also exploring his use of irony, contrast and dramatic action. Very few learners were confident about discussing 'melancholy' as a concept, though higher-level answers were fully alive to tone and mood, especially how 'Webster uses dark and black humour to shape the audience's response to Bosola, especially when contrasted with the evil brothers' total self-interest', as one essay suggested.

(b) This was the slightly more popular choice on this text, though overall a minority offering. Learners with at least a basic knowledge of the context were able to respond appropriately to Webster's presentation of the Aragonian brethren here. Understanding that they are talking about their sister and why they are so outraged with her was key in discussing Webster's presentation. Weaker answers tended either to summarise the events leading to and from this passage or to write generally about the Duchess herself, rather than her brothers. Better answers considered how Webster is developing the characters here, 'with the first real evidence of Ferdinand's weakening mental state revealed here in his intemperate words', as one learner suggested. Sound responses looked closely at his language and identified 'the disturbingly violent, sexual elements in his anger at his sister', as one learner noted. Webster's concerns were often well considered – the family relationships, the control of men, the violence and the contrast between the two brothers – 'vicious imagination and cold hatred', as one essay described it. Good answers developed their responses through close analysis of a variety of dramatic methods – the action, the language and the 'contrasting attitudes that develop their characterisation more powerfully', as one learner stated. For example, they analysed the blood imagery focusing on how 'it's a motif for status and social standing', according to one learner. Other good answers picked up on the significance of 'cupping' as a reference to how 'infections were purged and this relates back to the obsession with the family bloodline being diluted', as one learner argued. Very good answers moved seamlessly between the passage and the wider text as well, always considering the effects of Webster's dramatic choices and thereby developing a balanced and effective argument.

Question 4

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

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

(a) This was a minority choice on this text, though overall still a popular question. Just about every learner was able to find relevant material and often offered engaged personal responses. Nearly every answer suggested sex was 'one of if not the most important issue in the play', and many answers were able to distinguish the different attitudes revealed by the characters at least implicitly. Weaker answers tended to consider each character in turn, with Brick and Maggie very often the main focus of the discussion. Many answers at this level assumed Brick's homosexuality was a given, though unable to justify it from the text, and contrasted that with Maggie's 'neediness and lust for him', as one learner put it. Better answers at this level were more nuanced, recognising, for example, 'Maggie's determination to become pregnant and therefore secure the inheritance', as one essay argued. There was much discussion of the 'love triangle with Skipper', and better answers always had a firm, clear grasp of details from the text, to support their opinions. More competent responses developed the arguments with sound understanding of Williams's methods of characterisation, often contrasting 'Maggie's volubility with Brick's reticence (except when Skipper is mentioned)', as one learner put it. Other characters were also considered at this level: Mae and Gooper's children and Big Daddy's desires for other women were often mentioned. Good answers developed their responses by close attention to the task, often exploring how the different attitudes create 'dramatic tension and conflict, thus driving the play forward', as one essay stated. Very good answers were also alive to Williams's methods of revealing these attitudes, with some perceptive analysis of language, especially Maggie's and Big Daddy's, seen in answers at this level. Other essays explored Williams's use of stage directions and dramatic action, noting how 'even the setting of the play is the bedroom where Brick and Maggie's relationship falls apart', as one learner noted, with others noting that the 'bed dominates the stage, physically and symbolically, from Big Mama's point at it to the references to Peter Ochello', as one learner summarised it. More successful answers always had a confident command of textual detail and were comfortable ranging across the whole play, often in discussing the characters and their actions, but also in choosing apposite quotation to support their arguments. Where appropriate contexts were integrated into such discussions – often of the 1950s attitudes, McCarthyism and Williams's biography – the answers did very well.

(b) This was the most popular question in the drama section. All but a few responses had sufficient knowledge of the text to place the passage appropriately and to offer some relevant opinions about Mae and Gooper generally. Very weak answers were often confused by some of the detail, for example, some were unsure about the relationship between Maggie and Mae or unclear on Brick's role or Big Daddy's situation, with a consequent limitation to the responses. Basic answers had sufficient knowledge to offer personal opinions about the couple. For example: 'to make jokes

about his mom at this time is just plain wrong and shows how insensitive he is', as one suggested. Better answers at this level were able to implicitly address the task at least by considering the way Mae and Gooper interact with the other characters, with many noting Mae's antipathy to Maggie, for example. The more precisely the learners could contextualise this (or any other) relationship, the more successful was the associated commentary. 'Maggie is her rival for the inheritance, prettier and married to the parents' favourite, Brick, all of which motivates Mae to try to crush her in front of Big Mama', as one learner summarised it. Competent answers explored the dramatic situation – the revelation to Big Mama of Big Daddy's cancer – and saw Gooper's words and actions in that light. 'As the eldest son, he might comfort her, but all he wants to do is weaponize the cancer to take over the estate', as one learner noted. Many sound answers deconstructed the various ways in which both Mae and Gooper are presented as 'obnoxious, insensitive and completely selfish', as one learner suggested. Good answers analysed the methods Williams uses to achieve this, with language and dramatic actions, often indicated by the stage directions, such as the '*violent look*', the most commonly discussed point in the passage. Other answers noted the contrasting tones, and how, for example, 'Maggie's "*quietly and very sadly*" serves to highlight the inappropriate "*fiercely*" used by Mae.' Some good answers sought to defend the couple, in the light of 'Big Mama's and Big Daddy's evident favouritism for their alcoholic loser, Brick, to the detriment of the successful lawyer and family man, Gooper', as one summarised it. Very good answers developed such arguments in a balanced way, always considering the effects of Williams's choices and alive to the wider significance of seemingly small actions such as 'the way Mae dutifully fetches the briefcase, her use of "honey" and how Gooper is "*standing over Big Mama*", all suggesting this is rehearsed and premeditated and thus all the more repugnant to the audience', as one learner argued. Other very good answers analysed the ironies of Williams's presentation – Gooper's words to Doctor Baugh and his summary of the 'loving relationship with his father', were often very well deconstructed. Characteristic of all good answers was an awareness of the dramatic nature of this scene and how 'Williams subtly displays the conflicts and tensions in the relationships and the situation in order to enthral and captivate his audience', as one very good answer suggested, also citing Williams on the importance of leaving characters opaque.

Section B: Poetry

Question 5

MAYA ANGELOU: *And Still I Rise*

(a) Nearly every learner was able to select relevant poems on which to base their response. Some weaker responses used the set poem from option **(b)**, though with limited success. Better answers at this level tended to summarise the content of their chosen poems, with depth of the knowledge and understanding of them determining how well the responses were shaped to the task. More successful learners often started their essays with a statement of the 'freedoms that Angelou is writing about', as one put it, and this enabled a relevant and appropriate choice of material for the response. Popular choices of poems for this task were *Phenomenal Women*, *One More Round*, *Ain't That Bad?*, *Still I Rise*, *Call Letters: Mrs V.B.* and *Willie*. There was a wide range of freedoms considered, including political, private, sexual, social and racial. Where the learners supported their opinions with direct quotation from and reference to relevant poems, the discussions were often sound and competent. Better answers dealt directly with the more abstract concept of 'the idea of freedom', with some noting that 'the idea is more powerful than the actuality of freedom in many of her poems', as one learner suggested, referring to *Still I Rise* in support. Good answers were also focused on Angelou's poetic methods and thoughtful selection of contrasting poems enabled many learners at this level to analyse her methods in depth. Her use of 'dramatic and even shocking language', as one learner put it, was often discussed and others noted her use of imagery, the variety of poetic forms and her 'choice of unexpected speakers and voices', as one essay put it. The few learners confident enough to explore Angelou's use of rhythm and rhyme often produced very good essays, the hallmark of which was also developing arguments with appropriate contextual references and importantly having a perceptive awareness of the effects of Angelou's creative choices.

(b) This was the most popular choice in the poetry section, with most learners demonstrating at least a basic knowledge and understanding of the poem. 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 Angelou's references and concerns. Basic answers often had at least some understanding of Angelou's poem and were able to offer a generally relevant summary, though at this level there were at times unsupported speculations and assertions about the situation – 'the woman is

obviously a criminal' and 'she steals from the bureaucrats', for example. There was generally a lack of focus on the poetic methods in responses at this level, though some literary features such as language and imagery were identified, but not analysed. More competent answers were able to explain the impact of some of Angelou's choices, noting, for example, how 'the poet describes the woman's physical features, emphasizing her size in a series of cliches, such as fat arms and wobbly jowls', as one learner summarised it. At this level learners did not take the poem at face value recognising that Angelou was addressing racial stereotypes. Competent answers compared this poem to some of Angelou's wider concerns, with poverty, racism and 'failed parenting' common discussion points. Better answers at this level examined the language closely, noting, for example, how 'strangers/To childhood's toys' suggests 'not only the poverty of the family but also how the mother's neglect leads to them growing into adolescent criminals at a very young age', as one essay put it. Good answers developed the analysis further, noting the two-stanza structure, for example, and how 'the imagery of the fat mother in stanza one, a series of expected responses from those who see her, is balanced by the image of the unfortunate single parent fighting the system in the second stanza', as one learner summarised it. Other good answers explored the effects of some of the language choices: the 'den of bureaucrats' which for some learners 'hints at her vulnerability', or 'makes her a martyr like Daniel in the bible.' Her 'determination and resolution to take her rights in the end', were often viewed positively, with some sympathetic personal response to her 'search for a lucky sign amidst all of the negativity in her life', as one essay explained. Very good answers always considered the effects of Angelou's choices, often exploring in depth the impact of such phrases as 'too mad to work', and noting how in 'a few simple phrases Angelou creates a vivid picture of the woman, her family and her struggles to survive', as one essay suggested, citing 'fatback' and 'lima beans' as examples of 'heavily loaded language, which speaks to a certain kind of racial expectation and critical judgements'. At this level learners were confident in considering other poetic methods such as rhythm and structure and importantly their effects. There was at this level a secure grasp of contexts both within the wider selection of Angelou's poems but also within the poet's life and the period within which she lived. Such knowledge and understanding enabled learners at the highest level to inform their discussions appropriately and effectively, with judicious comments on Angelou's deeper concerns

Question 6

SIMON ARMITAGE*: Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

(a) Just about every response to had sufficient knowledge and understanding of the poem with which to address this question. Weaker answers tended to summarise more or less relevant relationships generally, with an understandable focus on Sir Gawain and Lady Bertilak, often with a passing reference to Queen Guinevere and King Arthur. Better answers at this level did shape their arguments, at least implicitly, to consider Armitage's presentation, often contrasting the 'devious, lustful attitude of the Lady compared to Sir Gawain's naive innocence', as one learner suggested. More successful responses developed this basic contrast through detailed commentaries on, for example, the nature of 'the testing of Gawain's virtue and chivalry', particularly in the context of 'the ultimate test he would encounter with the Green Knight', as one essay put it. Other responses explored this relationship in terms of attitudes to sex, honesty and social attitudes, with some noting that 'the Lady is a representative of the prevailing Christian attitudes to women at the time – a wicked seductress hell-bent on destroying unwary and virtuous men', as one essay summarised it, with many responses citing Sir Gawain's 'misogynistic outburst after his reprieve by the Green Knight'. Good answers looked closely at Armitage's methods, with confident, and at times perceptive, explorations of characterisation, symbols and poetic language. Context was largely historical but often appropriate, ranging from chivalric expectations to biblical representations of relationships between men and women. Very good answers also explored how the various 'threads of the narrative are linked by the male/female relationships', as one learner suggested in a detailed consideration of how the Lady's relationship with Sir Gawain contrasted with both her and his relationship with Lord Bertilak. Few learners were confident in discussing Armitage's alliterative techniques, but those who were, and could explore the effects appropriately, often did very well.

(b) This was a popular choice of question overall. Weaker answers tended to summarise the events leading up to Sir Gawain's arrival at the castle or to paraphrase the descriptions, with only a basic personal response. For example, 'Gawain is attracted to the castle and decides to try and stay there, but he does not know it is the home of the Green Knight yet', as one learner put it. Better answers at this level were able to give a more precise context, explaining why 'Gawain was so pleased to see the castle after his arduous journey and in view of his fearful encounter to come', as one essay suggested. More competent answers considered some of Armitage's poetic methods in

detail, particularly his use of language in describing the castle, 'strong, dominating and yet welcoming and comfortable', as one suggested. Others noted the use of hyperbole in the description such as 'heavenly height, uncountable, so perfect and wondrous depth'. Good answers analysed Gawain's response to it, 'significantly increasing its effect, given he lived in Camelot and could compare', as one noted, though for some learners the use of religious references such as 'signed himself' and the mention of Jesus and Saint Julian were symbolic of Gawain's 'true Christianity and also perhaps his implicit sense of danger', as one essay argued. Very good answers linked this to the wider text well: 'the castle is like its master, strong and powerful, attractive and inviting, but yet also dangerous and perhaps threatening', according to one candidate. Some learners noted the language of war and fighting, 'a reminder of the violence of Sir Gawain's quest', though for others the castle was more of a 'haven where Gawain would be welcome to forget his troubles and grow strong again'. Where such interpretations were supported by precise reference to the passage, with some awareness of effects, the responses often did very well. Few learners though at any level were confident in addressing Armitage's alliterative poetic methods, beyond mentioning the 'bob and wheel' and answers which could analyse the effects of the alliterative style and consider poetic methods such as rhythm and tone were generally very successful.

Question 7

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

(a) This was the least popular poetry question on the paper. Nearly every response chose relevant poems and had sufficient knowledge with which to address the task. Weaker answers summarised their chosen poems with only an implicit focus on the precise terms of the question. Better answers at this level had some understanding of Blake's concerns and were at least generally aware of the contrasts between the *Songs of Innocence* and the *Songs of Experience*. Sounder answers chose poems which enabled the responses to explore these contrasts in detail. Popular choices were *Holy Thursday*, *The Chimney Sweeper*, *The Little Boy Lost*, *The Little Boy Found* and *A Dream*. Many learners were aware of the social and historical contexts to Blake's work and more successful responses linked these directly to his concerns about education, religion and the Church. For example, 'Blake was a powerful political agitator expressing his views with bitter irony in *London* and *Holy Thursday*.' Good answers always explored Blake's poetic methods, especially his use of language, poetic form and symbols and were able to integrate analysis of some of these features directly into how he 'presents children as symbols of innocence and purity, but also as victims of abuse and adult exploitation', as one learner argued. The most successful answers had a secure and thoughtful understanding of the poems and were able to consider the effects of Blake's poetic choices on how a reader might respond to his presentation of children.

(b) This was a very popular choice, with nearly every response showing some knowledge of the poem *The Tyger* and its context. Weaker answers offered a general summary of the poem's content, with success determined by the understanding shown in the accompanying personal response. Many at this level identified the 'threat and fierce nature of the tiger', for example, with some noting the contrast with the lamb as an 'effective way of increasing the danger of the tiger to the reader', as one learner suggested. Some weak answers were unsure of some of the references, such as 'the immortal hand' and why the stars threw down their spears, with a consequent limitation in the interpretations. At this level, Blake's presentation was mostly ignored, though some learners had a basic awareness of language choices – 'the language of construction', as one essay put it. Others noted 'the repetition of the opening stanza', though the crucial change in verb was often unnoticed. More competent answers had secure knowledge of the poem and the context, placing the poem as 'a poem of experience in which Blake typically questions the moral and religious givens of his society', as one learner argued. Learners at this level were more focused on Blake's choices of language, seeing 'the negative connections with the industrial revolution' in the 'forge' and 'hammer', as one essay put it. Some connected this to 'Blake's negative view of the changes to his world', though others argued 'he was showing the power and strength of the tiger and its inhumanity.' Good answers explored the use of rhetorical questions, 'symptomatic of his doubts about religion and the world changing from innocence to experience', as one learner argued. Other good answers analysed the imagery and how 'Blake uses it to hint at his social and religious concerns', with some exploring the effects of the 'lack of the usual capital H for 'he' – so is it God or something else that is the creator?' as one essay wondered. Very good answers often had a considered and perceptive understanding of the poem's possible interpretations – many saw the tiger as symbolic, though differed in their interpretations: violence, danger and human fears were

often counterbalanced by strength, cosmic balance, and awe as possible meanings. At this level analysis covered a wide range of poetic methods, including verse form, structure, rhythm and rhyme – for some these were 'misleadingly nursery rhyme like, with Blake referencing how the tiger is the opposite of childlike in its form', as one essay argued. Where the analysis led to a consideration of the effects of Blake's choices, the answers did well, with the most successful responses integrating perceptive analysis into a convincing interpretation, based on secure understanding of the poem and appropriate contextual knowledge

Question 8

Songs of Ourselves, Volume 2

(a) This was not a popular question in the poetry section. Most learners were able to choose appropriate poems on which to base their response, though a few were constrained into using the Rudyard Kipling poem from option **(b)**, unavoidably limiting the success of their essays. Popular choices of poems were the extract from *Fears in Solitude*, *Australia 1970*, *In the Park*, *I Hear an Army …*, *Surplus Value* and *an afternoon nap.* Weaker answers offered more or less accurate summaries of their chosen poems, with more successful responses at this level, at least implicitly, considering conflict and how its presentation might be different in each of their chosen poems. More competent responses often had a clear introductory paragraph, choosing contrasting poems. One essay, for example, chose *Surplus Value* and *In the Park*, where 'lifestyle conflicts and work conflicts can be juxtaposed'. Such essays had a framework on which to structure their arguments, and this usually led to a successful answer. Better responses required not only a secure knowledge and understanding of the poems, but also a grasp of the poetic techniques used. Essays which explored the poetic methods, as an integral part of their arguments, did better. At this level most learners were confident in discussing language and imagery and linking the analysis to the poetic presentation of conflict. Few essays though were confident in considering rhythm and rhyme, though they were occasionally mentioned in passing. Poetic form and structure were rarely mentioned. Very good responses were comfortable in analysing a wide variety of poetic techniques, often comparing the choices of their two poets. Where this led to a consideration of effects, and how that shaped the reader's response to the presentation of conflict, the responses did very well.

(b) This was a very popular choice. Most learners had at least a basic knowledge and understanding of the poem *The Sea and the Hills*, with which to address the task. The weakest answers however did appear to be responding as to an unseen poem, with some unexpected interpretations offered, such as 'the poem is a speech by the king of the hillmen to rally his troops into attacking the sea and those who live near it.' Better answers at this level were able to explain Kipling's view of the sea 'as both dangerous and intriguing', as one learner suggested, though often basic answers struggled with the connection to the hills and some of the specific references, such as 'the Line', 'the Trades' and the references to kings and courts. There was only a general awareness of poetic methods at this level, language, imagery and structure were mentioned, and at times, exemplified, but without any analysis or supporting commentary. Some learners adopted a 'feature-spotting' approach: assonance, personification, alliteration, refrain, sibilance, anaphora, rhetorical questioning, and punctuation were all identified and at times exemplified. This was more successful when linked to an understanding of Kipling's concerns. More competent responses however were able, for example, to explore how 'each verse, though similar in structure, explores a different aspect of the sea, and by inference, the hills', as one learner suggested. The 'nautical, maritime language', as one styled it, was often well analysed, though variously interpreted as 'powerful and threatening' or 'volatile and unpredictable' or 'giving a sense of freedom from any interest in humanity and its control'. Imagery and rhythm were often well considered at this level, with more confident responses able to consider the effects of Kipling's choices. Very good answers addressed the task directly, noting how the 'sea and the hills are universal opposites in nature, but Kipling shows us their similarities', as one learner suggested. Other essays explored how Kipling presents 'the natural world through humanity's experience of it, whilst emphasising its otherness, its remoteness and its unknowability', as one perceptive response summarised it. Such responses were often supported by secure contextual knowledge. For example, a few learners linked *The Sea and the Hills* to what they knew of Kipling's life and his relationship with his mother. Others thought that he 'saw the sea as an unfaithful but fascinating woman', though such contextual pointing was only rarely integrated into the interpretation effectively. Very good answers developed such ideas by close reference to the poem's details and exploring fully the effects of Kipling's choices. The best answers were careful in choosing which parts to concentrate on. For example, only a few essays grasped the significance of the final line of every stanza and even fewer the full significance

of the final stanza, with ‘the subtle shifts in tone and mood towards the end of the poem’. Where such poetic choices were fully analysed and discussed in the context of an overall interpretation of Kipling’s presentation of nature, the answers did very well.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/12
Drama and Poetry

Key messages

1. Learners should select relevant material from the whole text and avoid lengthy narrative summaries.
2. Answers to poetry passage questions should start with a focused introduction to avoid unstructured feature spotting.

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, occurring most often because the learner had attempted more than the stipulated two questions. A few learners did appear to have time problems, so that the second essay was either rushed or incomplete. The vast majority of learners followed the rubric accurately and with a clear balance between the two answers. All but a few candidates were able to show at least a basic knowledge of their chosen texts and many learners showed evidence of a real engagement with them.

There are two general issues to address this session:

1 Many learners in this session included in their essays long, narrative summaries or descriptions of only generally relevant parts of their chosen text. This was apparent in answers on discursive **(a)** questions as well as passage **(b)** questions. For example, answers to either optional question on *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* often included a detailed summary of the relationship between Brick, Maggie and Skipper, irrespective of its usefulness to their response to the actual question. Learners should be encouraged to select carefully from the whole text the most relevant material to enable them to address all aspects of the task, perhaps as part of their essay planning process.

2 A number of option (b) essays on the poetry texts in this session started without any consideration of the terms of the question or in some cases any summative general introduction at all, choosing to start by listing the poetic features they had spotted in the poem. These essays often became a series of statements along the lines of 'The poet also uses enjambement', with some exemplification from the poem, before moving onto the next poetic feature. Candidates are advised to analyse their chosen examples, linking them directly to the actual task and/or their interpretation of the poem. Without this, the statements remain a list of poetic methods, which does not fully answer the question, and therefore cannot go beyond a basic level of achievement.

Learners should be encouraged to use their introductions to set out generally their interpretation of both poem and question as a framework on which their analysis of the poetic methods can be structured.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Drama

Question 1

ERROL JOHN: *Moon on a Rainbow Shawl*

This was very much a minority choice, with very few responses seen on either question.

(a) Nearly every learner selected relevant material with which to address this task. Weaker answers retold Epf's 'story', concentrating for the most part on his relationship with Rosa and his

'determination to leave the island to seek his fortune in England', as one learner put it. Better answers at this level were more wide-ranging in their discussion, exploring the different, for some learners contradictory, elements in his character such as 'his understanding with Esther and the baby balanced by his hardness to his grandmother and Rosa', as one essay summarised it. More competent responses addressed how John uses these contradictions to shape the audience's response, 'juxtaposing tenderness with brutality', as one essay noted. His desire not to be 'trapped or abused like Charlie', was for some learners central and his relationship with Charlie was often soundly explored, as a balance to his relationships with women. Essays were rarely analytical in approach and though dramatic action and the setting were mentioned, the effects of John's choices were not fully considered. This lack of focus on John's dramatic methods and the ways that language and dialogue shape the audience's response were limiting factors in the overall success of nearly all of the essays.

(b) This passage from Act 2, Scene 2 was marginally the more popular choice on this text. Most learners were able to place the passage in the context of Mavis and Prince's relationship more generally, with some remembering this 'leads directly to their engagement'. Weaker answers tended to summarise Mavis's part in the play generally with intermittent reference to the passage. Better answers at this level discussed how the relationship developed and at times explored it in comparison to other relationships, most often Epf and Rosa or Sophia and Charlie, though one learner did point out 'how by the end of the play Rosa and Old Mack end up just like Prince and Mavis.' More competent answers focused on some of the detail of the passage, noting Prince's 'attempt to be polite slapped down by Sophia as foreshadowing how Mavis treats him', as one learner suggested. Other answers at this level explored the different conflicts on which their relationship is based – moral, physical and cultural, for example, with some essays showing an awareness of how the conflicts create drama. The few learners who considered how John presents the relationship, looking closely at language and action, for example, did better overall, especially when there was some awareness of the effects; 'the comedy of Charlie's uproarious laughter, and the melodramatic way Mavis reacts to the sight of her own blood undermine the seriousness of the actual fight', as one learner argued. More nuanced responses did see how their care for each other was revealed in their words and actions, so that 'their relationship is not as hopeless as the audience might have thought', as one learner put it. Where such ideas were supported by precise references to the passage and an awareness of textual contexts, the answers did well.

Question 2

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Measure for Measure*

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

(a) Nearly every learner was able to select material with which to address this task. Weaker answers summarised the relationship between Angelo and Isabella generally, often showing detailed knowledge of the text and some understanding of how the 'relationship develops in the play from Isabella pleading for her brother's life to her pleading for Angelo's', as one learner summarised it. Better answers at this level were able to select relevantly, shaping the response to the task, with some secure explorations of the various 'mental stages Angelo goes through as he gives in to his desire', as one learner put it. More competent responses assessed the significance of his desire in terms of their relationship, but also discussing its importance as 'a plot device, that enables Shakespeare to create the dramatic conflict needed', as one learner argued. Other sound answers explored how Angelo's desire develops his and Isabella's characters in the play, 'his fall from the moral high ground mirrored how she climbs even higher on it, so that she even rejects her own brother', as one essay suggested. Good answers developed such ideas by looking carefully at Shakespeare's choices of dramatic methods – Angelo's language was often well analysed: 'we see his self-awareness, specifically stating his moral crimes in terms of saint and sinner', for example, though others argued 'his words show he knows he is doing wrong, but he excuses himself by blaming the woman.' Other dramatic methods such as action, contrast and soliloquy were also discussed at this level, with very good answers able to assess the dramatic effects of, for example, the settings. Contexts were at times considered at this level, with references to attitudes to women, the church and 'gender imbalance' all usefully integrated into the learners' arguments.

(b) All but a very few responses offered relevant discussions about the Duke. Weaker answers summarised his role in the play generally, showing detailed knowledge of his actions and his relationships, though with too little reference to the given passage. Better answers at this level

noticed, for example, that 'we do not see him again as a proper leader until the end of the play, so how he acts here is very important', as one learner argued. At this level there was insufficient awareness of Shakespeare's dramatic methods, though mention of 'the different relationships the Duke had with Escalus, Angelo and the people', implicitly suggested how Shakespeare shapes the audience's view. Too often such ideas led to detailed explanations of how 'he manipulates Angelo', or 'his dislike of public show is brought out when Lucio attacks him', so that there was too little focus on the detail of the passage. More competent answers kept the focus better, showing awareness of Shakespeare's methods, particularly language and imagery. Many responses were appropriately 'bemused by what he is actually saying to Angelo, with the tortuous syntax of the sentence and the rather confused imagery of the torch', whilst other sound answers discussed the difference between the way he speaks to Escalus and 'his more public words to Angelo'. Good answers explored the 'oddness of his words and actions', in details with some wondering 'what an audience not knowing the play would make of the Duke abandoning his role and people', as one put it. Some answers at this level appropriately developed such ideas through contextual links to King James I and Shakespeare's connections with the royal court. Very good answers explored the nuances of the Duke's words analytically, often making perceptive links to the wider text. For example, one learner suggested that 'though he talks of laws and justice, there is no mention of the moral and corrupt state he is leaving his kingdom in for others to sort out.' There were some excellent analyses of his words about Angelo, 'which suggest his lack of trust in his deputy, by asking for Escalus's view, and that Angelo is only "dressed" in his authority', as one learner put it. Other responses linked his comments here to his 'later revelations about Angelo's treatment of Mariana'. Very good answers always had an informed view of his characterisation, providing a structure to the analysis of his presentation in the passage. For some he was 'devious and dishonest', whilst others thought him 'more of a statesman in his public pronouncements'. The ambiguity and ambivalence of Shakespeare's presentation was often discussed with very good answers identifying the dramatic methods which 'leave the audience wondering about his role in the play, with the forthcoming shock of his disguise as a humble friar', as one learner suggested. Such arguments, when supported by close reference to the passage and the wider text and context, always did very well.

Question 3

JOHN WEBSTER: *The Duchess of Malfi*

This was the least popular text in the drama section, with most learners offering the **(b)** passage option.

(a) There were not enough responses to this question to be able to make a general comment on performance.

(b) Most responses had at least a basic knowledge of the context to this passage from Act 2, Scene 3, the Duchess's confinement, though some very weak answers seemed unsure of the relationship between Antonio and Bosola and the precise cause of the tension in this scene. Basic answers summarised the events leading up to this point in the play, often in detail, with too little attention paid to the passage itself. Better answers at this level summarised the two characters' roles and why 'they were equally concerned about the Duchess but for very different reasons', as one learner summarised it. More competent answers discussed some of the details appropriately, the apricots and the nosebleed for example, with sound understanding of the way that 'Webster creates an atmosphere of doom and conflict, at what should be a time of joy for Antonio, the birth of his child', as one learner suggested, with the 'threat to the child in the nativity reading particularly disturbing'. Good answers considered the dramatic methods carefully, the language 'broken and threatening between the two men showing how anxious they are', and the dramatic action, especially the fighting in the darkness, were often well discussed. Other good responses analysed the role of Bosola as the intelligencer, noting how his 'letter to the brothers will lead to the death of the Duchess at the hands of Bosola', as one essay put it. Very good answers were aware of tone and atmosphere, and integrated textual references to the wider play seamlessly, as they explored the 'characterisation of the two men, one of whom is trying to save his wife's honour and reputation, whilst the other represents the corruption and death that awaits her', as one learner summarised it. Where such arguments were supported by precise references to the passage and some analysis of the effects of Webster's choices, the answers did very well.

Question 4

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

This was the most popular text from ***Section B***, with over three quarters of the learners choosing this text, most of whom tackled the **(b)** passage option.

(a) Nearly every response had at least a basic knowledge of the text from which to select relevant material to answer this question. Weaker answers tended to summarise the relationship between Brick and Maggie, often in detail, though with only an implicit recognition of the specific terms of the task. Better answers at this level ranged more widely in the text, with the marriages between Big Mama and Big Daddy, as well as Mae and Gooper, also discussed relevantly. More competent answers did consider the question appropriately, and often had interesting ideas about 'how different marriages had different ways not to understand each other', as one learner suggested. For some Brick 'did not understand Maggie's need for love and attention', whereas for other learners 'Maggie never realised it was Brick's jealousy of her and Skipper that was the problem.' Big Daddy 'never understood that Big Mama really did love him until too late', one suggested, and others 'saw her inability to understand Big Daddy's need to be the alpha male' as the root cause of their marriage problems. There was general agreement that Mae and Gooper 'understood each other only too well, in their grasping desire for money and power over the estate', though as one good answer suggested 'their apparently perfect American dream of a relationship, home and family, was in fact deeply ironic as it is the failed, imperfect but complex marriage of Brick and Maggie that the audience sympathises with.' Good answers considered Williams's methods in detail, often with good analysis of his use of language, irony and dramatic action. 'The lack of understanding is revealed in the lack of communication between the partners', as one learner suggested, giving well chosen examples to demonstrate the point. Other good answers explored the setting – 'the failed marriage bed of Brick and Maggie being the axis around which all of the couples circle', as one suggested – and the dramatic action. Many answers discussed the physicality of Big Mama in looks and action, as well as Maggie's 'seductive and alluring attempts to be noticed by Brick', according to one. Very good answers developed such analysis into perceptive comments about the effects of these choices, both on the other characters and on the audience – so that 'Mae's calling Gooper "Honey" and constantly thrusting the children into the limelight, seems repulsive, given how she treats Maggie and Brick', as one essay argued. The best answers always had a very secure knowledge of the text and perceptive understanding of Williams's concerns, with effective structuring of their points, to present a balanced and cogently argued response to the task, often with well-integrated and apposite reference to relevant contexts, such as the American dream and American family life in the 50s.

(b) This was the most popular drama question and there were many very good responses. Nearly every response had knowledge of the three principal characters in this passage and some understanding of the various relationships. Weaker answers often summarised what they knew of the characters and the events involving them, sometimes in great detail, leading to a lack of focus on the details of the given passage. Brick and Big Daddy's relationship was often the main focus, though, at this level, there was sometimes insecurity of textual knowledge and what had been 'revealed to each other by Big Daddy and Brick already', as one essay wondered. Better answers at this level considered how Mae's interruption was crucial in 'setting the tone for the lack of privacy in the household which leads to a lack of communication', with good answers expanding this idea by considering how 'one of Williams's concerns in the play is mendacity and Mae's words here contrast Big Daddy's honesty', with others noting the setting in Brick's bedroom and the 'prevailing atmosphere of spying and suspicion, which shows the frank exchange to follow between father and son in a positive light', as one learner argued. Competent answers considered the significance of the passage in terms of the characterisation – 'Brick's general silence even to his father and his acknowledgement of his drinking problem', were often noted whereas for other learners 'Big Daddy's passion about the estate, privacy and above all his son are important developments in his character for the audience.' Good answers developed these points by considering Williams's methods, especially the language and the dialogue 'Brick's brief responses and offhand acceptance of the spying, Big Daddy's hectoring of Mae and her melodramatic overacting are all in sharp contrast', as one learner noted, though some essays saw 'some comedy on the exchange between Big Daddy and Mae – his rage and bluster contrasted to her pretence of outraged innocence might even have made Brick smile', as one learner suggested. Very good answers struck an effective balance between detailed analysis of specific moments in the passage and

reference to the wider text and at times appropriate contexts, with analysis always including a consideration of the effects of Williams's choices.

Section B: Poetry

Question 5

MAYA ANGELOU: *And Still I Rise*

This was the second most popular poetry text, with most responses choosing the **(b)** passage question.

(a) There were only a few answers offered to this question. Most learners were able to choose relevant poems on which to base their responses. Popular choices were *My Arkansas, Through the Inner City, Kin, Thank You Lord, Momma Welfare Roll* and *Still I Rise*. Weaker answers summarised part of their selected poems, often with insecure knowledge and understanding. Other weak answers did show how Angelou talked about race in her poems, but were unable to develop this into considering her presentation of racial tensions. Competent answers selected wisely, choosing poems which offered contrasting experiences and attitudes, with some sound discussions comparing for example the 'dark undertones of threat and conflict in *My Arkansas* to the lighter almost glorifying tone of *Ain't That Bad,'* as one learner summarised it. Other sound answers contrasted 'the external tensions between different communities with the family tensions or personal tensions of dealing with abuse,' as one essay suggested. Good answer considered her poetic choices, most commonly language and her use of 'blues music rhythms to suggest a positive view of race,' as one learner noted. There was often some appropriate contextual pointing of the arguments at this level. Overall there were only a very few attempts to show how Angelou explored these tensions in her poetic choices, but those learners who considered the effects of her words and poetic structures did well.

(b) This was the second most popular poetry question, with most learners showing at least a basic knowledge and understanding of the meaning of the *Where We Belong, A Duet*. Some very weak answers were insecure in their summarising of the poem, suggesting the poem was being treated as an unseen, with a consequently limited response in terms of context and confidence in discussion. Better answers at this level had a clear view of the poem's meaning, 'since the speaker is searching for love and meaning in their relationships', as one suggested. Others could identify the different ways the speaker 'tried to find the one', with some able to link the ideas of 'going out and socialising with *Phenomenal Woman* and *Just for a Time*', as one learner put it. More competent answers considered some of Angelou's poetic methods. 'The jaunty bounce rhythm and the light rhymes such as "breezy" and "easy" suggest the speaker is too casual and flippant to find true love', as one put it, though others noticed how the 'rhythm and language change in the last verse to suggest a depth in the way the speaker views her new partner.' Good answers noted how Angelou suggests 'a wide-ranging search in halls and country lanes, with a lot of different partners, all treated in the same light, unthreatening way and ultimately discarded', as one learner argued. There was some debate over the gender of the speaker, with arguments made for a variety of interpretations, the most successful rooting their opinions in specific textual detail. Answers became very good as they explored the effects of Angelou's choices. For example, how 'the romantic games are presented as exactly that by the internal full rhymes such as "wined and dined" and "bye now" and "try now"', with others identifying how the 'multiplicity of settings for the search created a determined image of the speaker, braving dangers.' There was some contextual pointing, which was integrated well into the discussions by the more successful answers, though perhaps surprisingly only a very few responses attempted to analyse the poem's title and the effect of the word 'duet'. Those that did often had a very secure basis for analysing the language and rhythms of the poem in terms of Angelou's appreciation of music.

Question 6

SIMON ARMITAGE*: Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

This was the least popular text in the poetry section with only a few answers seen and most of those on the option **(b)** passage question.

(a) There were not enough responses to this question to be able to make a general comment on performance.

(b) Nearly every learner was able to place this passage in its appropriate context, after Sir Gawain has paid his debt to the Green Knight. Weaker answers spent too much time in setting out the background context of the passage, often retelling the two encounters between Sir Gawain and his adversary in great detail. Basic answers did focus more on the passage and the two characters, though there was uneven knowledge of the relationship between the Green Knight and the lord of the castle in some very weak answers. Better answers at this level could discuss the change in the tone between them, which 'has gone back to the warm friendliness of their evenings in the castle', as one essay suggested. More competent responses saw how the relationship had changed 'now that Sir Gawain's perfect chivalry has been broken, he seems to be the subordinate', though for others 'Bertilak's shifting from Green Knight to courteous host is troubling, set against the innocence and goodness of Sir Gawain', as one learner argued. At this level there was sound consideration of some of Armitage's methods, the symbolic girdle was much discussed, with the language, such as Gawain's use of 'a Christian vocabulary in describing the sins of the flesh, at times well analysed. Good answers had a developed understanding of Armitage's concerns, particularly attitudes to women and knightly courtesy, 'shown by Bertilak's honesty in giving Gawain his true name', though others wondered 'why after so many nights in his castle, it is only now that Gawain wants to know who he is', as one put it. Very good answers analysed some of Armitage's alliterative poetry methods well, though only rarely were learners confident in discussing its effects. At this level the religious references in the passage, particularly the 'misogynistic old testament characters', as one styled them, were fully analysed and often placed in an appropriate context.

Question 7

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

This was a popular text in this session, though most learners chose the passage **(b)** option.

(a) There were very few responses seen to this question. Most responses had at least a basic knowledge of the text and were able to select more or less relevant poems with which to address the task. Very weak answers did attempt to use unhelpful poems, such as *The Chimney Sweeper*, with consequent limitations on the effectiveness of their response. Better answers at this level were able to summarise their chosen poems, with *The Tyger*, *The Lamb*, *A Cradle Song* and *The Fly* being popular choices. At this level, though there was understanding of Blake's concerns generally – for example 'nature is seen as place of innocence and healing compared to cities and the factories', as one learner put it – this was often asserted, rather than demonstrated by reference to the text. More competent answers were able to do this and often to integrate some contextual references to the Industrial Revolution for example, which 'for Blake was the antithesis of everything that was natural and pure', as one put it. Sound answers also considered some of his poetic methods, with learners showing awareness of Blake's choices of language and imagery, though at this level rarely able to consider their effects. Good answers considered how the poetic choices shaped the way that a reader might respond, with some able to distinguish between, for example, the 'harsh, mechanical language in *The Tyger* and the vocabulary of the gentle lamb', as one suggested, supporting the idea with specific quotations from the poems. At this level, learners were confident in contrasting the innocence and experience poems and made judicious choices of poems to enable them to exemplify their arguments. Very good answers explored a wide range of Blake's concerns, most commonly religion and loss of innocence, and were often able to integrate telling contextual points into their essays.

(b) This was a much more popular choice on this text. Very weak answers appeared to be responding to an unseen, unaware of the companion poem in *Songs of Innocence* and struggling to develop an appreciation of Blake's concerns. Basic answers often summarised the poem and talked generally about religion, schools and the industrial revolution, without linking the ideas to specific parts of this poem. Other answers at this level offered a line-by-line paraphrase, though were unable to develop an argument about the nurse, beyond generalisations. More competent answers were aware of the companion poem and were able to discuss in what ways this nurse is 'typical of what happens with experience – we lose our youthful enjoyment of life's simplicity', as one learner suggested. Sound answers also considered Blake's poetic methods; language and imagery were often discussed with

some learners alive to 'the effect of the poem looking like a nursery rhyme, with its simple structure and rhyme scheme.' For others this was 'ironic given the negative attitudes of the evidently disappointed nurse', as one learner suggested. Good answers linked this poem not only to the companion poem but also to Blake's 'attitudes to childhood and education', with some seeing the 'negative effects of experience as inevitable'. Others looked closely at the effects of the choices with, for example, many responses analysing her face turning 'green' and exploring the symbolism of spring/day and winter/night. Few learners were confident in analysing the idea of 'disguise', though some suggested it was how 'the nurse has to hide her true self', though from what or whom was not considered. At this level, contextual points, whether textual or more widely drawn, were specific and often illuminated the learner's argument appropriately.

Question 8

Songs of Ourselves, Volume 2

This was the most popular poetry text on the paper, with the overwhelming majority of learners choosing the option **(b)** passage question.

(a) There were very few answers to this question**.** Nearly every response was able to select relevant poems with which to address the task, with popular choices *Passion*, *The Clod and the Pebble*, *Winter Song*, *'She was a Phantom of Delight'*, *Stabat Mater* and *In the Park*. Weaker essays showed some knowledge of their chosen poems, with better answers at this level having a partial and straightforward understanding of the poems' meanings, though rarely considering poetic methods. More competent answers often made sound choices of contrasting poems, giving a useful structure to their argument. Some learners at this level did consider poetic methods, most often language and imagery and were able to support their points with relevant quotations. Good answers had a very secure knowledge and understanding of their chosen poems, shaping their selections to address the task fully. They also focused on how the poets 'explored' relationships, through their choices. For example, '*In the Park* with its desolate and bleak language, showing the woman's desperation, has a different tone to Wordsworth's 'fantasy' about his wife as a spirit and an angel', as one suggested. Language and imagery at this level was often discussed with some insightful analysis. Very good answers developed this further, with perceptive analysis of other poetic methods and their effects, such as form and structure, though very few were confident in discussing rhyme and rhythm. Very good answers also were able to compare the poems in detail in forming their arguments. Where such essays had detailed references to the poems and some awareness of appropriate contexts to support the arguments made, they did very well.

(b) This was a very popular question, with some very engaged responses to *The Buck in the Snow* in nearly every essay. Weaker learners at least knew what was 'happening' and could give a summary of events. Many at this level could recognise something in the formal structure with 'the isolated line separating two different moods, life and death', as one essay suggested. Basic answers were often able to spot poetic features such as enjambement and caesura. Though most answers could exemplify these methods accurately, there was no analysis of the effects or a consideration of why Millay might have chosen to use these poetic features. Competent answers did have an overall view of the poem on which to build their analysis. At this level, some responses considered, for example, 'Millay's deft handling of time' and explored the 'voice' of the poem, often noticing how it shifts from the question at the start to the concluding reflections. More competent answers had a sound understanding of Millay's concerns, as she is 'thematically addressing the fragility of life and the concept of the life cycle', which some essays developed into an analysis of poetic methods. For example, 'the past tense is suggestive of a sequence of events that cannot be rectified, showing the finality of death.' Good answers developed the scope of the analysis, considering symbols, contrasts, pathetic fallacy and language in detail. The antlers were well explored, for example, with observations about majesty, strength and 'a symbol of masculinity' with some noticing the 'jarring twist of death bringing the buck to his antlers', as one response explained it. Very good answers were alive to the effects of Millay's choices, with the mention of 'hemlock' often considered a 'foreboding of the death to come', for example. Other very good answers looked at the structure of the poem in detail, how the 'two halves are not symmetrical because the rhyme pattern changes, indicating the change of mood as we focus on the doe, emphasised by the full rhyme', as one learner analysed it. Very good answers also explored the effects of 'the subversion of typical sentence structure here, which resembles an almost biblical indictment about witnessing miracles, causing it to make the reader feel accountable', as one learner argued. Where such arguments were supported by close reference to the poem, the answers invariably did very well.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/13
Drama and Poetry

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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, occurring most often because the learner had attempted more than the stipulated two questions. A few learners did appear to have time problems, so that the second essay was either rushed or incomplete. The vast majority of learners followed the rubric accurately and with a clear balance between the two answers. All but a few candidates were able to show at least a basic knowledge of their chosen texts and many learners showed evidence of a real engagement with them.

There are two general issues to address this session:

1 Many learners in this session included in their essays long, narrative summaries or descriptions of only generally relevant parts of their chosen text. This was apparent in answers on discursive **(a)** questions as well as passage **(b)** questions. For example, answers to either optional question on *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* often included a detailed summary of the relationship between Brick, Maggie and Skipper, irrespective of its usefulness to their response to the actual question. Learners should be encouraged to select carefully from the whole text the most relevant material to enable them to address all aspects of the task, perhaps as part of their essay planning process.

2 A number of option **(b)** essays on the poetry texts in this session started without any consideration of the terms of the question or in some cases any summative general introduction at all, choosing to start by listing the poetic features they had spotted in the poem. These essays often became a series of statements along the lines of 'The poet also uses enjambement', with some exemplification from the poem, before moving onto the next poetic feature. Candidates are advised to analyse their chosen examples, linking them directly to the actual task and/or their interpretation of the poem. Without this, the statements remain a list of poetic methods, which does not fully answer the question, and therefore cannot go beyond a basic level of achievement.

Learners should be encouraged to use their introductions to set out generally their interpretation of both poem and question as a framework on which their analysis of the poetic methods can be structured.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Drama

Question 1

ERROL JOHN: *Moon on a Rainbow Shawl*

This text was not a popular choice in this session.

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

(b) Only a few answers were seen on this question. Weaker answers tended to summarise the events leading up to Epf's departure and the various relationships, though some were unsure about the role of the minor characters such as Old Mack and Esther. Better answers at this level discussed how this scene 'is an ending for Rosa and Epf, but a start for Rosa and Old Mack', as one learner put it. More competent answers moved beyond narrative summary, with some consideration of John's dramatic methods. His use of stage directions 'to help the audience picture the scene more clearly', as one essay put it, and the use of capital letters to 'suggest a lot of shouting and tension', were often discussed. Other sound answers explored John's choice of language, how the 'final words of Epf about the baby, so negative and selfish, undo the audience's good opinion of him, right at the end', as one learner suggested. Some better answers explored the dramatic action, noting that 'this final scene is disturbing for the audience, with the violence towards to Sophia and the sudden appearances of Rosa and Old Mack quite shocking, given how she laughed at him earlier', as one learner suggested. Good answers were able to consider the significance of these revelations in the context of the wider play and where such interpretations were supported by specific reference to the passage and text, with some awareness of John's dramatic methods, the answers did well.

Question 2

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Measure for Measure*

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

(a) Nearly every learner was able to select relevant material from the play with which to address the task. Weaker answers often summarised some of the key events and considered whether the outcomes were just. For example, Angelo was discussed in nearly every essay, with a wide range of views offered, some thinking his 'escape from real punishment scandalous', while others thought 'it shows the Duke has learned about mercy and forgiveness.' Answers at this level often had a clear knowledge and understanding of Angelo's actions on which to base their judgments. Better answers were often wider ranging in their choice of examples, with Claudio often cited as a 'contrast to the real criminal, Angelo', as one summarised it. Organising essays around different types of justice enabled some answers to become more competent, contrasting, for example, Shakespeare's presentation of actual criminal behaviours such as Angelo's and Barnadine's with 'suspect moral actions from the Duke, Lucio and even Isabella', as one learner noted. The justice of what happens to these various 'criminals' was much debated at this level, with some arguing that 'the actions of the strict and the religious characters such as Angelo and Isabella deserve greater punishment than merely being married off', as one learner suggested. Good answers used such contrasts to discuss Shakespeare's methods, especially the language and imagery used by Angelo in his soliloquys and Isabella in the convent and to her brother. Very good answers analysed other dramatic methods as well, with contrasting characters, comic interludes and dramatic action the most commonly discussed, often with close analysis and appropriate examples. Some very good answers considered the nature of justice in more abstract terms, with one learner, for example, identifying criminal, moral, religious and social justice in the play, exemplifying these and showing how 'Shakespeare uses the conflicts between these different expectations of justice to create both the drama and characterisation.' Others explored the 'gulf between the expected "Measure for Measure" and what actually is presented to the audience', with some seeing the tensions as 'created by the opposing demands of Christian forgiveness and the legal system's focus on punishment', with Escalus as a 'halfway house between the Duke's lenity and Angelo's strictness', as one essay put it. Where such arguments were supported by close reference to the text and awareness of appropriate contexts, the answers did very well.

(b) This was the more popular question on this text and most learners had at least a basic knowledge of the context to enable them to consider the significance of this exchange between the 'disguised, manipulative Duke and the frantic, shocked Isabella', as one learner saw them. Weaker answers summarised the situation at this point in the play, often in detail, though at the expense of sufficient focus on the passage. Some essays spent too long explaining about Angelo, Claudio and the Duke's disguise, though showing secure knowledge of the play. Better answers at this level kept the focus more on Isabella's situation with many wondering why 'the Duke, now knowing the full scale of Angelo's wickedness, simply does not reveal himself and put it all right', as one learner summarised it. More competent answers considered Shakespeare's methods of characterisation, noting how the 'Duke uses Isabella's desperation to further his own secret mission against Angelo, showing him to be untrustworthy and devious at the very least.' Isabella's 'strangely quick

acceptance of the proposal to use Mariana's misery', as one put it, was widely discussed, with many finding her to be 'somewhat hypocritical and selfish'. Answers with a secure knowledge and understanding of the textual context were able to explore how this exchange is significant in 'the development of both the plot and the characters'. Better answers considered Shakespeare's methods closely, weighing up the impact of 'the Duke's revelations about Angelo's hard-heartedness to his grieving betrothed', with some linking this back to 'what now seems a strange decision to put Angelo rather than Escalus in charge of Vienna', as one learner argued. Good answers integrated close analysis into such reflections. Shakespeare's choice of language was often well analysed, from Isabella's 'wishing for death for Mariana and Angelo', and her 'meekness to the friar', often contrasted with the 'business like, organising tone of the Duke', as one learner put it. The Duke's use of imperatives, his commanding tone and his assumption of control were all well analysed. Very good answers developed such analysis with close reference to the passage and the wider text and there were some perceptive references to contexts seen in the best essays, notably attitudes to women with the Duke's 'instinctive skill in mansplaining', as one put it, often noted and references to King James.

Question 3

JOHN WEBSTER: *The Duchess of Malfi*

There were too few responses to this text, the least popular in the drama section, to be able to make a general comment on candidate performance.

Question 4

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

This was the second most popular text from **Section B**, with most learners choosing the **(b)** passage option.

(a) Most of the learners who tackled this question had sufficient knowledge and understanding of the play to summarise the relationship between Big Mama and Big Daddy. Weaker answers were able to retell the key events, such as Big Mama's elation at the news about Big Daddy's cancer, his 'mean and unsympathetic jokes at her expense', as one learner put it and 'their domination of their children at least until the end of the play'. Basic answers often had a clear opinion about the two characters, with most learners 'sympathetic to Big Mama's devotion and appalled by Big Daddy's selfishness'. More competent answers also considered the relationship itself, with some exploring the shift in dynamic as the play progresses, so that 'Big Daddy, once the alpha male, is now reliant on her to save him from the pain of cancer', as one learner summarised it. Sound answers also considered Williams's methods in detail, for example, how 'her loud and coarse language and behaviour grates on Big Daddy in particular.' Other responses noted 'her vulgarity, her exorbitant spending of Big Daddy's money, and her steely remonstration with Margaret on satisfying Brick', which some noted as the 'other side of the coin compared to Big Daddy's version of their sex life'. His 'rough but shrewd understanding of her and his family' was often noted and many cited his 'use of language associated with wealth and money', to suggest the 'emptiness of his life despite its apparent success', as one learner summarised it. Good answers considered their relationship in terms of the play as a whole, contrasting with the other marriages on display for example, with many noting that 'Big Daddy, unlike Brick, keeps to his side of the sexual bargain, despite him hating her', as one suggested. Very good answers analysed the effects of the relationship closely – 'part of Williams's savage presentation of marriage generally', as one learner noted. Other answers at this level analysed their separate roles within the relationship and the play as a whole, with her 'refusal to accept Big Daddy's true health issues a stark contrast to the ingratiating manipulation of Mae and Maggie, the other wives in the play.' Big Daddy, as a husband, was often contrasted with Brick and Gooper and there were some perceptive discussions on Williams's methods of characterisation through contrasting language and actions. At this level, learners had a very secure command of the detail of the play and were able to support arguments with apposite quotation, as well as making telling contextual references, often to traditional roles in a marriage and in a family.

(b) This was the most popular drama question. Nearly every answer could explore the relationship between Brick and Big Daddy relevantly and were at least implicitly able to discuss the significance of this exchange to that relationship. Weaker answers tended to summarise what had happened by this point in the play between them, though some were distracted into giving too much detail about their marriages with Maggie and Big Mama. Many basic answers were able to explore Brick's

attitudes to Skipper, though some learners based their interpretation on 'knowing that Brick is a closet homosexual', without being able to support that view either from the passage or the play more generally. More competent responses were able to explore the complex relationship between Brick and his father and analyse the significance of what is said regarding sexuality and, more importantly, what is unsaid. Other sound answers offered some insights into how this passage humanises Big Daddy, revealing his intelligence and insight and his genuine love and concern for Brick, often contrasted to his attitudes to Big Mama and Gooper. Good answers developed these ideas, with some suggesting that Brick's attitude to Skipper here indicates 'platonic friendship, compared to Big Daddy's unhealthy interest in Maggie's sexual performance, already revealed by Maggie herself', as one learner summarised it. Some learners argued that 'Brick's relationship with Skipper is revealed as more emotionally intimate than sexual, in contrast to most of the other relationships in the play'. Others though noted that 'Big Daddy, the successful businessman, saw her as a commodity to be used and discarded as required', with some linking this to his 'determination to take a lover to celebrate, falsely as it turns out, his good health reports', as one learner suggested. Very good answers analysed Williams's methods closely. His use of stage directions was often noted, for example, exploring Brick's response to his father: 'The stare, the turning back to Big Daddy before moving for a drink, the look at the ice in the tongs, and then the careful positioning of Brick downstage to gaze (as Maggie did) into "*the house*"'. At this level there was perceptive analysis of language. For example, 'Brick's disorganised speech and language hint at how riled up he is as well as how long he held the story in', as one learner noticed. Nearly every response saw that 'This is the most the audience have heard Brick talk' and some thought he seems 'intoxicated with temporary comfort', as one learner put it. Those learners who noticed that 'Williams tells us that Brick will reveal Big Daddy's cancer' to him were able to consider the structural significance of this passage, with very good answers alive to the various levels of 'dramatic irony that the playwright constructs through his choice of language and actions', as one learner argues. Where these arguments were supported by apposite quotations and some analysis of the dramatic effects the answers did very well.

Section B Poetry

Question 5

MAYA ANGELOU: *And Still I Rise*

This was the most popular poetry text on the paper, with the overwhelming majority of learners choosing the passage **(b)** question.

(a) There were very few responses to this question. Learners were generally able to select relevant poems with *Just Like Job*, *Just For A Time*, *The Traveler*, *Through the Inner City to the Suburbs* and *One More Round* popular choices. Weaker answers summarised their chosen poems with some awareness of the kind of journey involved and usually with an implicit contrast. Better answers chose contrasting poems, giving the response a useful structure and ensuring at least two kinds of journey were discussed. Competent answers often contrasted 'actual journeys through places with emotional or spiritual journeys', as one leaner suggested. Few learners were confident in discussing Angelou's poetic methods, though her choices of language and imagery were at least mentioned in the better answers. Very few higher-level answers were seen and though some did show secure knowledge and understanding of Angelou's poems and linguistic choices, they were more or less silent on her other poetic methods, such as form, structure, rhyme and rhythm, with a consequent limitation in the success of the response.

(b) This was the most popular question in the poetry section and on the paper as a whole. Weaker answers were unable to reference the rest of the poem and seemed at times to be responding as to an unseen poem, with a consequent limitation in the interpretations. Basic answers did have knowledge of the poem and some understanding that the 'presentation of the woman was one of assertion and confidence'. At this level responses were characterised by personal opinions on 'the way that Angelou is challenging stereotypes associated with women's appearance', often leading to engaged but ultimately limiting personal anecdotes. Better responses at this level could link their ideas to the rest of the poem and to Angelou's concerns more generally 'often to do with challenging white male stereotypes about race and women', as one learner noted. Competent answers did look at Angelou's poetic methods, with language and imagery often well discussed at this level, particularly the 'fashion model's size' comment, though this tended to prevent learners from seeing the poem as about more than just a male fantasy of how a woman should look. Nearly

every response at least mentioned the 'honey bees' with many learners appreciating 'the power exuded through the "bee" imagery', as one learner commented. Sound answers were also often aware of wider contexts so that 'Angelou's confidence in her womanhood develops her character, from a victim of sexual assault to a successful woman', as one noted. Higher-level responses made useful comments on structure and the use of repetition and word order – in particular the lines:

'I'm a woman
Phenomenally.
Phenomenal women,
That's me.'

These were often perceptively discussed. Other good analyses considered the rhythm and rhymes in detail. For example, 'The poem is repetitious, generating musicality throughout and the rhythm shows the woman's pride in her stride', as another good response suggested. Overall, though, all responses, even those at the higher levels of achievement, lacked confidence in considering fully the effects of Angelou's choices. This limited the overall success of essays even where there was confident knowledge and perceptive understanding.

Question 6

SIMON ARMITAGE*: Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

This was a minority choice of text and most learners opted for the passage **(b)** question.

(a) The very few responses seen to this question had at least a basic knowledge of the poem and were able to summarise some of the details of the wager. Basic answers did this in detail, going through each of the three stages in turn, though often more confident in discussing Sir Gawain's encounters with the Lady rather than the hunting scenes. More competent answers saw the symbolic nature of the wager and of the 'prizes which each gives to the other', with particular emphasis often placed on the 'girdle, as a symbol of Sir Gawain's failure', as one suggested. Good answers developed through considering some of Armitage's methods as well, with one learner noting the 'contrast between the two wagers between the men, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and the beheading, which links to the wager with the Lord in the castle', as one summarised it. Where such arguments were supported by close reference to the text the answers did better, though most learners were unable to confidently discuss Armitage's poetic choices, especially his use of alliterative verse. Most answers had at least an implicit grasp of relevant contexts, particularly the 'chivalric code and traditions', as one learner put it. Where such contextual references were used to support an argument about the significance of the wager in the poem as a whole, the answers did well.

(b) This was the more popular choice on the text, but there were still only a few responses seen to this question overall. Weaker answers were unsure of the precise context of the passage and where it came in the overall wager between the Lord and Gawain. Basic answers paraphrased the passage and summarised the overall situation, largely ignoring Armitage's presentation, but showing knowledge of the text and some engagement with Armitage's concerns. More competent answers, often going through the passage sequentially, offered comments on various of Armitage's poetic choices – alliteration, language and enjambement and imagery were the most common. The analysis of these methods was not always linked to an overall interpretation of the passage or poem and consequently became an unstructured series of apercus. Better answers did explore the details, noting that the 'violence and graphic detail of the boar's death is in stark contrast to the image of Gawain, in a bed of luxury, fending off the lady', as one learner neatly summarised it. Other good responses saw the whole scene as 'a metaphor for Gawain's situation, so that the detailed explanation of how the boar is conquered mirrors the different strategies taken by the lady in trying to conquer the knight.' Few responses were confident in considering Armitage's alliterative poetry, apart from some comments on the 'absence of rhymes except in the bob and wheel', and nearly every answer would have been improved by a closer analysis of the poetic methods and, importantly, their effects.

Question 7

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

This was the least popular poetry text on the paper.

(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 responses overall. 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 Blake's references and concerns. Basic answers often had at least some understanding of the poem and were able to offer a generally relevant summary, though at this level there was not much of a coherent distinction offered between *Innocence* and *Experience*. Better answers at this level were able to contrast this poem with *The Tyger* and showed some understanding of Blake's wider concerns. More competent answers looked at some of Blake's poetic methods, appreciating 'the rhyme scheme and structure gives the effect of nursery rhyme', as one essay commented. Other sound answers discussed the biblical references used, showing some contextual knowledge in their interpretation of the poem. There were few higher-level responses seen overall, though good answers were always focused on the detail of Blake's presentation, exploring, crucially, the effects of the rhythm and rhymes in the context of the whole poem and Blake's concerns more generally in the text.

Question 8

Songs of Ourselves, Volume 2

This was a popular choice of text, with all but a very few 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) This was a popular choice. Weaker answers had little knowledge of the poem and seemed at times to be responding as to an unseen, often confused in trying to identify the speaker or by some of the references, with consequent severe limitations in their interpretations. Basic answers did have at least some knowledge of the poem and some understanding of Jeffers's concerns. For example, 'The poem is a metaphor for Time, showing nature's power, humanity's decline and isolation', as one suggested. Personal response at this level was often sympathetic to Jeffers's concerns and typically pessimistic about the future: as one suggested, 'in the grand scheme of the earth's history, we are quick to destroy ourselves and never learn', as one learner summarised it. More competent answers linked such personal responses and ideas to Jeffers's poem more directly: 'the poem presents the solution, where the strife of war and conflict become unnecessary', as one suggested. Others developed this idea further: 'isolation is presented as a positive in this poem, through its use of comforting imagery', though for others 'the boar provides contrast – it does not care about nuanced political arguments, it only cares about what is real.' Where such arguments were linked to sound analysis of some of the poet's choices, the answers were more successful. Identifying the 'speaker' and the situation helped some to explore Jeffers's language and imagery choices, though only a few learners could discuss rhythm and poetic structure with any confidence. A number of learners adopted a 'feature spotting' structure where a poetic method such as enjambement was listed and exemplified from the text. For this approach to be successful it should be integrated into an interpretation of the poem, showing what nuances that particular choice brings to the overall meaning and context.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/21
Prose and Unseen

Key messages

- Responses which rely on summary of the set texts or unseen extracts are not successful.
- Successful responses focus closely on the writing of the texts and how the writer presents the meaning and content to the reader.
- Successful responses use analysis of specific references and quotations to support the points made. This is particularly important for the **(a)** questions, where candidates select their own references to answer the question.
- Successful responses to **(b)** passage questions use the prompt 'comment closely' to focus securely on analysis of the writing of the selected extract.
- While specific references to other parts of the text are not a requirement in **(b)** passage questions, knowledge of the rest of the text usually informs successful responses.
- In **Section B: Unseen**, successful responses show how the text type's literary features communicate the meaning and contribute to the reader's or audience'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

This session, examiners saw responses to all the set texts and unseen texts, each of which attracted thoughtful discussion. While nearly all candidates showed knowledge of the texts, it was evident that a sizable number approached the **(b)** passage questions on the set texts as unseen material, with little or no knowledge of the novel or short story. Significant errors of understanding therefore invariably made such responses very weak. More candidates, though, had prepared carefully and wrote thoughtful essays exploring 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. For success, 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. 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

Kiran Desai: *The Inheritance of Loss*

(a) While there were fewer responses to the question about the presentation of Kalimpong than to the passage, many answers were thoughtful and detailed. Candidates could approach the question by considering the physical and geographical aspects of Kalimpong or by discussing the residents of the town, but most combined these effectively. Examiners saw interesting exploration of Desai's focus on the beauty and isolation, with Kanchenjunga as the backdrop in the opening and closing of the novel. Some essays discussed the climatic conditions, with rain and cold at different periods, and noting the poor weather which covers the robbery of both Cho Oyu and Biju. Candidates also

noted how the isolation and poor infrastructure results in the poverty of the region, preparing a fruitful ground for the Gorhka rebellion, while even those of former wealth, such as the Judge, Lola and Noni, now live in much reduced circumstances. The impact of colonialism fuelled a number of answers, which noted the Western pretensions and preferences of the households of Cho Oyu and Mon Ami and how these made the Judge, Lola, Noni and Uncle Potty strangers in their own country and portrayed by Desai as absurd figures.

(b) The larger number of candidates chose the passage, though apart from the repetition of 'green card', many missed opportunities for analysis because they did not focus sufficiently on Desai's writing in the extract. Many were aware of the importance of the card and of Biju's feelings of dejection, but did not draw these aspects directly from a close commentary on the passage. For example, relatively few commented at all on Desai's distinctive playfulness with structure and typography in ll.14–19, an obvious feature of the excerpt. More confident responses developed from the repetition of 'the green card, the green card' to explore how Biju's desperation is matched by his fear of 'a superduper zing bing beep peeping high-alert electronic supersonic space speed machine', the almost-nonsense onomatopoeic language indicating the immigrants' fear of discovery by technologies they can only imagine, while the displaced words and phrases which follow are mimetic of the electronic connections being made, leading to determination of '*Illegality*'. Here, the italicisation and capitalisation emphasise their true status and therefore the immigrants' and Biju's desperation for the green card which will make them legal. Observant responses were able to link the second half of the passage to this, noting, for example, how the colour green dominates the descriptions, as it dominates Biju's mind. There was discussion too of the other Americans descended from immigrants who have maintained their cultural traditions, like the couples from the synagogue, while the homeless man and the chicken which scratches 'in a homey manner' in some ways resemble Biju himself. Some stronger answers looked closely at the end of the passage and noted how Desai communicates the conflict within Biju, at once desperate for the legal status of the green card, but also homesick and feeling 'a flash of anger at his father', however much he recognises that 'he wouldn't have forgiven his father for not trying to send him'.

Question 2

Ian McEwan: *Atonement*

(a) The question about the incident with the vase was much less popular than the passage, but was answered well by those candidates who avoided summarising the action of the novel which follows it. More successful responses showed awareness of the vase's provenance and its importance to the Tallis family and were able to address its significance in terms of plot and a catalyst for Briony's actions. This was helped by the use of key references to different parts of the novel, including the vase's role in *Two Figures by a Fountain* and its ultimate shattering. Its breaking was often seen as symbolic, with candidates suggesting a range of possibilities including Cecilia's virginity, the relationship between Cecilia and Robbie, the Tallis family, the class system, warfare and Robbie's death. Some candidates listed these, not all of them convincing and some of them contradictory. A number of candidates needed to think a little more clearly about their symbolic suggestions in order to argue a more persuasive case. Successful answers were grounded in a very secure recall of the details of the incident in Chapter 2, with its causes, effects and results. The most confident candidates were able to show not only how the incident reverberates through the plot of the novel, but also how it opens up McEwan's interest in varying perspectives through the three separate versions of the incident, seen through Cecilia's, Briony's and Robbie's viewpoints. They argued, with clearly selected evidence, that the incident is fundamentally significant to both the plot and the metafictional style of the novel.

(b) While candidates could only really make sense of Briony's justification with knowledge of the wider text, too many candidates discussed the text, her 'crime' and her use of the novel to justify her actions without really commenting closely on the passage, which is the core skill required for the **(b)** question. Sometimes quotations from the passage were used to ground the broader argument, but these questions demand a detailed examination of the writing of the selected passage for a competent to very good response. The passage repaid careful reading and analysis. Many started with the punchy opening short sentences with their opposition of 'crime' and 'lovers', exploring the ambiguity of whether Briony refers to Marshall's crime or her own, and the use of literary terminology. Candidates linked this to her reference to *The Trials of Arabella* and noted her use of the possessive in 'my lovers', which indicates that Robbie and Cecilia are her constructs. While surprisingly few mentioned the shock to the reader of the revelation of Robbie and Cecilia's fates, several commented on the dry, detailed, factual recording of the details of their deaths, suggesting

both that this presented the unadorned 'truth' and that the style indicates that these details are etched on Briony's consciousness. There was useful comment on her rhetorical questions, often seen as an attempt to persuade herself rather than readers, while others saw self-pity in the tricolon 'too old, too frightened, too much in love with the shred of life I have remaining'. The language of fiction recurs throughout, with 'inventions', 'fantasy', 'solitary typescript' and 'novelists' and many candidates noted that it is in this section where McEwan's metafiction becomes explicitly clear, causing readers' reassessment of the novel. Most candidates picked up the comparison with 'God', many assuming that this 'God-complex', as some candidates termed it, shows Briony's arrogance and condemns her further, often missing that she uses this reference to show that the role prevents the atonement that she seeks: 'No atonement for God'. While many candidates took an antagonistic line towards Briony, there were a few sophisticated responses who looked at McEwan's role behind Briony, as the ultimate novelist, with Briony being just as much of a construct as Cecilia and Robbie – and of course, their deaths on 'Bray Dunes' and at 'Balham Underground station'. These essays considered the role of the reader, whom Briony considers in the passage and who are the focus of the rhetorical questions. These argued that in this passage, McEwan shows that readers, and readers' expectations, are complicit in the shaping of fiction.

Question 3

Stories of Ourselves Volume 1

(a) *Real Time*, *Of White Hairs and Cricket*, *Tyres* and *Five-Twenty* were the most popular stories used in answer to this question, but there were also interesting responses which used *Report on the Threatened City* and *The People Before*. Some answers were narrative-based, but the most successful carefully focused on 'responses to death' and compared these between, or within, stories. For example, some were able to discuss the awkward social obligations of the Mitras as they attend the shraddh ceremony in *Real Time*, emotionally unaffected by Anjali's death, and compared this with Ella's sense of liberation following Royal's death in *Five-Twenty* and her sense of desperation when the man from the Holden also dies. There were thoughtful connections too between the narrator of *Tyres*, recounting his poignant story which shows that he has never recovered form the death of Cécile, for which he feels responsible, and the narrator of *Of White Hairs and Cricket*, who wants to weep at the possibility of death following his brush with mortality. Lessing's and Shadbolt's stories presented the possibility of comparing attitudes within each story, with the aliens' attempts to warn of impending death in *Report on the Threatened City* while the human population carries on regardless, and the contrasting Pakeha and Maori attitudes to death in *The People Before*. Candidates who knew their chosen stories well and were able to select secure references and quotations to support their arguments did very well here, focusing on how attitudes to death are presented by the writers, not just comparing the attitudes themselves.

(b) This passage from *To Da-duh, in Memoriam* by Rohinton Mistry attracted many answers, which were stronger when they were informed by knowledge of the rest of the story. A number of candidates drew out very well how this first meeting is a significant foreshadowing of the future relationship and challenge between the narrator and her grandmother. This also prevented the misreading that examiners saw quite frequently, arguing that the description shows that the narrator is fearful and vehemently dislikes Da-duh. Confident responses noted the culture shock of New Yorkers arriving in Barbados, the unfamiliarity extending to family members. The strongest responses commented on the retrospective narration, signalled by 'I remember' which nevertheless recreates the child's responses to the experience. They also discussed the passage as one constructed with a series of paradoxes, beginning with the light and dark of the disembarkation shed and continuing, crucially, in the presentation of Da-duh herself, with the horrific images of 'death mask', 'maggots' and 'ruined skin' balanced by 'her eyes were alive', 'a sharp light' and 'some kind of child'. The same contradictions occur in the broader physical description, which presents her as 'beginning to bend ever so slightly' yet also is holding 'that back straight'. Alert candidates noted that Marshall brings those paradoxes together in ll.35–36: 'all the opposites contained and reconciled in her'. While many candidates noted the association of her name with 'thunder', not many recognised that it is 'fading softly in the distance.' Some candidates were aware of the vestiges of colonial influence in the grandmother's preference for 'fair-skinned' grandchildren, but many commented on the implications of the final paragraph, seeing the scrutiny of 'peered' and the shock implied in 'quickly drew back.' This was an area where whole text knowledge was crucial, as this final paragraph indicates the relationship to come, and the final sentence suggests the ultimate victory of the narrator in her challenges to her grandmother. It also, though, creates the connection between the characters, and the link which survives Da-duh's death.

Question 4

Mark Twain: *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

(a) Many responses to this question were narrative, often summarising Huck's and Jim's journey with little reference to the question's focus on 'dangers'. The most confident responses were carefully structured, looking at the dangers from which both Jim and Huck are escaping, the physical dangers of an unprotected journey down the Mississippi, and the dangers presented by the people they meet on the journey. These were most successful when essays demonstrated a secure grasp of the whole text in the precise selection of key episodes and telling quotations. Strong answers developed from the ways in which Twain presents those dangers to a consideration of how Huck and Jim deal with them, which led them into discussion of Huck's growing maturity during the journey and the development of Jim as a father figure, with both of them at different points playing a key role in the protection of the other. Twain's depiction of the human dangers too was frequently recognised as his condemnation of aspects of American society prior to the Civil War.

(b) The passage on Pap was very popular, but seldom led to strong responses as most essays merely gave a summary of the episode, without very much consideration of Twain's presentation of it. Most noted that Pap is drunk, but many also asserted that he is psychologically disturbed or has taken other drugs. Apart from the initial repetition, few responses looked at the writing of the passage. The more productive and confident responses began with the rhythmic sense of continuation in that repetition, and the syndetic structure and onomatopoeia of the third sentence with its verbs 'groaned', 'moaned' and 'thrashed' indicating both pain and violence. Such answers were also aware of the effects of the description being Huck's narration of his own father's antics, for most of the passage dispassionately describing his frantic behaviour, 'looking wild and skipping around… and yelling about snakes.' There is an indicative lack of surprise in the tone of the account. It is only when pap 'went for' Huck with the 'clasp-knife' that Huck's narration registers his concern, as he 'turned short and dodged' before he 'slid out of the jacket' and 'saved' himself, the sequence of verbs indicating the urgency. Some commented on the increase of pace in the final paragraph, reflecting the chasing and Huck's desperation, with references to the longer sentences. Some answers looked at Pap's speech ll.19–21, arguing that it shows that Pap is fearful of reprisals, which might indicate guilt, and the inexorable 'tramp – tramp – tramp' suggests the inevitability of his fate catching up with him. Some linked this, and his reference to the 'Angel of Death' to the revelation of his death at the end of the novel. There is plenty in the extract to write about, with some candidates showing how Twain creates an auditory sense of the mayhem in the cabin with examples such as 'awful scream', 'screaming', 'hollering', 'moaning', 'crying', 'laughed *such* a screechy laugh', 'roared and cussed', compared with moments of quiet when Huck could 'hear the owls and the wolves … and it seemed terrible still.' They also picked out the verbs of violence throughout, such as 'kicking', 'jumped up', 'chased me round and round' and 'made a grab'. Several noted how Pap's behaviour, and Huck's narration of it, dehumanises him, with 'wild', 'panting', 'crawled' and 'wallowed'. One or two candidates considered that Twain creates a dark comedy in this episode, combining humour with horror, as he does at other points in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

Section B: Unseen

Question 5 – Prose

This was an accessible passage and candidates at different levels responded to it with some enthusiasm. Less confident candidates were able to recognise the bullying and the narrator's preference for his separate sleeping room, despite its population of cockroaches, and recognised his determination to separate himself from those who abuse him. More confident responses saw that the question's focus on 'the life of a servant' applies not only to the narrator, but also his colleagues, and noted that the narrator is separated from the other servants in a number of ways and therefore does not fall in with their communal way of thinking and living. These recognised that he is a newcomer to Delhi and that his scathing reference to '*everyone who lives in the city*' indicates that he is from a rural area. This led to some candidates exploring the irony of the rural servant having higher standards than his city counterparts, having to abandon his 'uniform' and don 'dirty shirt and trousers' to be like them. Nevertheless, his outsider status remains, as is clear by the 'teasing', and the long list of possible reasons for it demonstrates that it is not, in fact, a personal issue. A number of candidates noted the opposition of the pronouns 'I' and 'they' throughout the extract, demonstrating the narrating servant's separation from his colleagues and his dismissive attitude towards them. While most essays commented on the abundant evidence of poverty and poor living conditions, too many thought that the description of the small room applies to all the living quarters, thus missing the point of

the continued teasing in ‘Had a good night among the roaches?’ More confident responses were aware that this room is the narrator’s particular choice and those which looked closely at the writing were able to note the effect of the contrast between ‘It was horrible, this room’, the syntax putting the emphasis on the adjective, and ‘It would do’, emphasised in its own separate paragraph. Many commented on the ‘cheap whitish plaster’ and the ‘flimsy little bed’, though surprisingly fewer explored the details of the visual and aural description of the cockroaches, by which the writer creates the horror of the narrator’s experiences. Again, sharp responses noted the horrible description and the unexpected contrast with the statement ‘it was mine’, indicating the narrator’s preference for the ‘continuous noise’ of the cockroaches over the ‘teasing’ of his colleagues. His crushing of the cockroaches was often taken to be a substitute for crushing his fellow servants, which was fair, though overlooked the reference to ‘*everyone who lives in the city*’, showing how the narrator separates himself not only from other servants, but from all urban dwellers.

Question 6 – Poetry

Almost as many candidates chose to respond to the unseen poem as did the unseen prose. Most recognised the running motif of language and writing in its diction and imagery. A small number decided the poem was about politics, or relationships, for example, while the most successful followed the question’s prompt about ‘the presentation of the sea’. Some suggested that the structure of the poem, with its tercets of different line lengths, imitates the rhythms of the sea. Others commented on the fact that some lines do not begin with capital letters, not recognising that the capitalisation fits with the sentence structure and that therefore the last four stanzas comprise a single sentence, following the reference to ‘the sentence of water’. Many candidates explored the link between the idea of reading/learning to read and surfing/learning to surf, and the struggle to do these activities. Many followed the narrative of the poem carefully, beginning with the surfers in ‘wetsuits’, attempting to interpret and ‘read’ the changes of the sea in order to accomplish their sport. Most recognised the idea that the waves are presented as the sea’s self expression though ‘phrases’, ‘each swell’ and the ‘false promises’ of those waves that never come to anything. The tension created by the repeated ‘We wait’ was often noted, while alert responses recognised that the four-stanza sentence recreates the motion of surfing, a moment of ‘fluency’ and a ‘moment of balance on the tightrope of a wave’ before it collapses and ‘rubs us out’. Most candidates were able to explore ways in which the poet suggests that the sea ultimately has the upper hand over human endeavours – ever changing, powerful, even dangerous, with references to ‘kamikazing’ and ‘rubs us out/in a diaspora of water’, ‘leaving us to struggle’. Many candidates seemed to enjoy teasing out the references and metaphors; the essays were most successful when the discussion offered a coherent reading of the whole poem.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/22
Prose and Unseen

Key messages

- Responses which rely on summary of the set texts or unseen extracts are not successful.
- Successful responses focus closely on the writing of the texts and how the writer presents the meaning and content to the reader.
- Successful responses use analysis of specific references and quotations to support the points made. This is particularly important for the **(a)** questions, where candidates select their own references to answer the question.
- Successful responses to **(b)** passage questions use the prompt 'comment closely' to focus securely on analysis of the writing of the selected extract.
- While specific references to other parts of the text are not a requirement in **(b)** passage questions, knowledge of the rest of the text usually informs successful responses.
- In **Section B: Unseen**, successful responses show how the text type's literary features communicate the meaning and contribute to the reader's or audience'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

This session, examiners saw responses to all the set texts and unseen texts, each of which attracted thoughtful discussion. While nearly all candidates showed knowledge of the texts, it was evident that a sizable number approached the **(b)** passage questions on the set texts as unseen material, with little or no knowledge of the novel or short story. Significant errors of understanding therefore invariably made such responses very weak. More candidates, though, had prepared carefully and wrote thoughtful essays exploring 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. For success, 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. 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

Kiran Desai: *The Inheritance of Loss*

(a) A number of candidates ignored the word 'love' in this question and instead saw 'relationships', concentrating their answers on the Judge and Nimi. As there is little love in this relationship, this was not a successful strategy as the essays did not sufficiently address the question. Those candidates who dealt with romantic love more successfully considered that relationship as one where the reader might conventionally expect love, but Desai's presentation subverts that expectation. These essays often compared Jemubhai and Nimi with Sai and Gyan, considering the ways in which Desai develops the latter loving relationship from tender immature infatuation to

disillusionment and separation. Successful responses also considered other types of love in the novel, and here the cook's and Biju's love for each other as father and son was often discussed well. A few candidates also considered Jemubhai's love for Mutt, his dog, often compared with his lack of love for his wife. A very few candidates considered the GNLF guerrillas' love for their homeland. Where this occurred, it allowed some interesting contextual considerations, especially when compared with Desai's presentation of the Judge's, Lola's and Noni's love for Britain and Europe, and their lack of regard for their own country.

(b) Examiners saw some interesting responses to this passage from Chapter 37. While some were reliant on narrative summary, many thoughtfully explored ways in which Desai presents Lola and Noni as elite and detached from their environment. There were some observant comments on the sisters' list of possessions which demonstrates their adherence to European values, a collection of 'Magpie things' that are now obsolete and useless. These values and experiences were purposefully compared with the current state of the house, with 'No gas … or kerosene' and 'no electricity' and the vulnerability of Lola and Noni, highlighted by the entry of the GNLF boys who 'climbed through the kitchen window' because of the 'enormous locks' on the doors. Some essays featured deft discrimination between the presentation of Lola and Noni, while most candidates observed the implications of the sisters' misplaced assumption that the boys will not understand English, while they do not understand Nepali themselves. Opinions were divided on whether the GNLF were justified and polite or aggressive and threatening; the most careful responses argued that the 'disconcerting politeness' is an uneasy mask covering threat, betrayed by the boys' uninvited entry and their cassettes with 'the favorite washing-bloody-kukris-in-the mother-waters-of-the-Teesta speech.' Most responses recognised that in this episode, Desai suggests the decay of the Europhile Indian society and the shifting of power to indigenous values.

Question 2

Ian McEwan: *Atonement*

(a) The question on the presentation of Cecilia was much the less popular of the two options on *Atonement*, and unfortunately many of these were restricted to an account of Cecilia's actions in the novel. However, some essays were more successful as they explored ways in which she is shown as both part of the family unit, almost a substitute mother, as well as detached from it, and eventually entirely divorced from it in her loyalty to Robbie. Some considered the class implications of her relationship with Robbie and several saw her as a modern woman, shaking off the expectations of her time and class, with her education at Oxford and her nursing during the war. Her freedom and messiness were often compared with Briony and sophisticated responses discussed carefully that the reader's understanding of Cecilia is always shaped by McEwan's use of Briony's narration, even if that is only understood at the end of the novel. Too many candidates celebrated the happy ending for Cecilia with Robbie, without acknowledging that her characterisation as a happy fulfilled lover to Robbie in **Part Two** of the novel is Briony's invention precisely because this is not the character that was allowed to develop because of her accusation of Robbie. Thoughtful responses saw Cecilia as a victim of Briony's power through both her actions and her narrative.

(b) Many candidates seemed to enjoy writing about the presentation of the Marshalls and most found interesting things to say about Paul Marshall's age and Lola's vivacity, usually making appropriate links and comparisons with earlier parts of the novel. Details such as Paul Marshall's 'lacquered cane' were picked up, indicating both wealth and incapacity, as well as his 'shrunk' face, his appearance as 'doddery and flat-footed' and that he 'couldn't bend at the waist', which were often compared with his confident and debonair appearance at the Tallis house in **Part One** of the novel. The passage invited comment on the changes since Paul's assault of Lola. Many candidates were thoughtful in their discussion of the irony of the assaulter now dependent on the support of his victim, though some suggested that the observation that 'his hand was firmly on her arm' suggests that he is still controlling Lola. The presentation of Lola also provided opportunity for careful exploration and a variety of interpretations. Some picked up on the 'Cruella de Vil' comment to suggest that she is characterised with a calculating villainy in her 'scarlet wide-brimmed fedora' and 'high heels' at 'Near-on eighty years old'. There was discussion too of the ambiguities inherent in the description of Lola as 'lean and fit as a racing dog', with its acknowledgement of her physical resilience paired with the unflattering animal comparison, which was sometimes linked with the image of her 'terrible agility' at the end of the passage. Observant candidates noted the implications of 'indoor tan', 'her vigour' and 'the black coat, the lurid lips.' The most thoughtful responses, however, were very aware of the fact that the passage is Briony's narration and

therefore influenced by her own judgements and opinions. Some suggested that there is a tone of enjoyment in the descriptions of Paul Marshall's frailties and jealous dislike in the depictions of Lola's 'heavy on the make-up' appearance. Some very sharp answers detected a self-knowledge in Briony's tone, with phrases such as 'That may sound sour', 'or was I clutching at straws?' and 'I count myself an unreliable witness', indicating that she is aware of the partiality of her account and presentation of Paul and Lola. This led to consideration of the phrase 'this … was the side on which her bread was buttered' and discussion of the presentation of Lola now as the aged wife of the rapist of her youth. Some linked this with what they saw as her calculation and her current position of wealth and privilege, having manipulated her position to her advantage. Candidates were very aware of the irony of 'how much good [Paul Marshall] did in the world' and Briony's balance between 'a lifetime making amends' and 'just swept onwards without a thought', with essays offering differing views. Some responses also contained thoughtful observations suggesting that Briony's presentation of the Marshalls villainises them in order to avoid her own culpability, while she seeks to 'avoid a head-on encounter' on the museum steps, just as she does in refusing to speak out about her knowledge.

Question 3

Stories of Ourselves Volume 1

(a) There were very few responses to this question. The answers which were offered referred to such stories as *On White Hairs and Cricket*, *To Da-duh, in Memoriam*, *The People Before* and *Five-Twenty*. Those who chose the first two stories often considered how elderly characters are perceived from the perspective of a young person, charting the decline of the narrator's father and the epiphany of his friend's father's illness in *On White Hairs and Cricket*, and the ambiguous presentation of the grandmother in *To Da-duh, in Memoriam*, and the unexpected bond between her and the narrating granddaughter. Candidates discussed the respect shown to the elder in *The People Before*, being returned to the land of his birth at the time of his death, while many candidates were sensitive to the thwarted desires of Ella in *Five-Twenty*, desperate for affection despite her age.

(b) This question about a passage from *My Greatest Ambition* by Morris Lurie attracted some engaged responses, often appreciating the humour of Lurie's presentation of the narrator's excitement. Often, though, appropriate quotations were selected, with an assurance that they demonstrated excitement, without the analysis to show *how* it is demonstrated. More careful candidates commented on the clichéd hyperbole of the narrator 'tossing and turning' about his comic and the sentence of short phrases ll.8–11 which articulate his indecision before the climactic short sentence 'Away it went.' The telephone conversation also attracted much comment, with some candidates able to explore how the retrospective narration pokes fun at the narrator's younger self, pointing out his diminutive size as he is 'standing on tiptoe' and talking 'unnecessarily loud' as he tries to show his business-like confidence. Some commented that his misjudgement is emphasised by the verbs 'shouted' and 'yelled' and furthered by the use of exclamation marks after each response to Miss Gordon's questions. The final question of the passage, 'What to wear?', focuses on a perennial adolescent concern. There was some debate about the narrator's father, with some candidates arguing that he is a malign influence, only concerned in a materialistic way with money. Fewer recognised an amused portrayal of a sardonic father, emphasised by the hyperbole of his 'Fifty times a night' doubting questions, refusing to be impressed by his son's artistic exploits. In this way, Lurie augments the excitement of the narrator by the contrast with his father.

Question 4

Mark Twain: *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

(a) There were few responses to the question on Twain's presentation of death. Candidates who attempted it often listed a number of the deaths in the novel, but some more successful answers shaped an interesting argument in response to the prompt. For example, some noted that the journey down the Mississippi is framed by Pap's death, at first hidden from the readers and Huck by Jim before it is revealed at the end. Answers also noted that the journey itself is only possible because Huck elaborately fakes his own death, so that death has a key influence on the events of the novel. A number of essays also discussed ways in which Twain presents American society's response to death, its apparently Christian values undermined by a casual attitude to death. This was demonstrated with references to the absurdity of the Shepherdson and Grangerford feud, particularly its final shoot-out, and Colonel Sherburn's shooting of Boggs. Some candidates lost

direct relevance to the question in their lengthy consideration of Christianity, but some were able to explore the hypocrisy of Christians in their cavalier attitude to human life.

(b) While there were certainly several narrative responses to this question, the passage from Chapter 33 also attracted some thoughtful and sensitive responses. These noted that Twain's presentation is communicated through Huck's narrative voice and perspective, guiding the way that the reader responds to the duke and the king. Such answers noted that Huck and Tom make their escape from the house 'out of the window' in order to warn the fraudsters of plans against them, showing Huck's empathy despite being a victim of their antics along with Jim. This view is continued at the end of the passage, when Huck describes himself as feeling 'kind of ornery, and humble, and to blame, somehow', feeling the guilt of the mistreatment of the duke and king despite his lack of involvement. Again, candidates argued that this shows Huck's capacity for empathy and that his comment on 'a person's conscience' and the 'yaller dog' demonstrates a maturity of moral judgement rarely shown by the novel's characters. Candidates pursuing this argument also noted Huck's physiological response to the sight of the tarred and feathered men: 'it made me sick to see it'. These answers noted the generosity of his feeling 'sorry' for the fraudsters, describing them as 'poor pitiful rascals', Huck's language and attitude markedly different from the vengeful crowd and the duke and king themselves. His comment 'Human beings *can* be awful cruel to one another' was seen to be borne of Huck's wider experience which the treatment of the duke and king confirm. In strong answers there was also appreciation of the visual and auditory ways in which Twain presents the crowd, with 'a raging rush … with torches' and the onomatopoeic 'whooping and yelling … banging … and blowing', all contributing to the image of the pair's humiliation. Candidates also commented on the dehumanisation of the presentation as the two sit 'astraddle of a rail … all over tar and feathers'. Huck comments directly that they 'didn't look like nothing in the world that was human', but like 'a couple of monstrous big soldier-plumes', with a number of candidates commenting particularly on the adjective 'monstrous'.

Section B: Unseen

Question 5 – Poetry

Although it is a relatively complex poem, candidates responded well to *For My Sons & Daughters* and most were able to give at least a straightforward reading, while some showed a remarkably sophisticated understanding of a father's expressions of regret towards his children. Aware of form, a number of candidates made thoughtful comments on the poet's use of free verse to communicate his developing thoughts in three stanzas of progressively shorter length. A few noted that each stanza comprises a single sentence, each a stage in the poem's consideration of the parental relationship. Many candidates wrote well about the father's seeking to rebuild broken bridges with his children, the communication of a sense of regret and sorrow, time passing and failure. Stronger responses wrote sensitively about the apparent vagueness of the wrongs inflicted upon the children and how that created a sense of the reader intruding on something private and intimate between the two parties. Many noted the speaker's acknowledgement in the first stanza that it would take 'forgetfulness' and 'exorcism' for his children 'not to condemn' him, but that the poem moves toward his wish that, notwithstanding, they might come to some realisation in their 'adult bitter years'. In this progression, some noted the parallel between 'This much he cared,' in stanza 1 and 'He really cared then?' in stanza 2, showing the father's hope of the children's ultimate acknowledgment of his love. The final stanza often drew thoughtful comments, with perceptive candidates noting the progression through 'my loneliness; my failures; my amalgam wish to serve', building the speaker's justification for his 'derelictions', and many saw in his 'I hoped to shape your better world', a father whose hard work for the protection and advancement of his children had led him to neglect them emotionally. Confident candidates discussed the confessional tone of voice in the poem, though views of this varied, with some finding great pathos in the stanzas and others finding self-righteousness. The latter argued that there is something egotistical in the repeated personal pronouns and the sense of grandiosity in phrases such as 'my continental sense of sorrow'. Most candidates inferred that the speaker desires his children's forgiveness as well as their understanding.

Question 6 – Drama

This passage proved another example of a drama text which elicited lively and enthusiastic responses. Although there are no stage directions beyond '[*Enter* OLD WOMAN]', many candidates had a strong physical and visual sense of a surreptitious entry and Inés' refusal to look in the direction of the mysterious character. Successful responses noted the ambiguity in the Old Woman, initially described by Inés as 'Something horrible' which she 'won't look' at, but who proves to be 'just an old woman' who addresses her

kindly as ‘my love’. Though few wondered why the ‘place was guarded’, a number of candidates noted the eeriness of a character who can pass through ‘bolts or bars and doors of steel’. There were comments on the forceful plosives of this phrase and a recognition that the ‘special set of keys’ is a metaphor for supernatural ability. Perceptive candidates noted ll.17–18 as key to the audience’s understanding, where the non-threatening ‘Then I’ll wait’ turns into something more ominous after the implied pause with ‘I’ve been waiting a long time. People seem to think I’ll go away.’ These responses noted the way that from this point, the Old Woman controls the scene, with long speeches briefly interrupted by Inés’ nervous interjections. Her final monologue repaid close attention, its short sentences gradually clarifying the identity of the mysterious woman. While some argued that she represents the ageing process, most suggested that she is the personification of death, bringing euphemistic ‘sleep’ to ‘Everyone’. Some candidates saw humour, some a sadistic relish, in the woman’s account of the ways she brings people to their ends, either by taking ‘away their eyes … so the world gets darker’ or by taking away ‘their money and their livelihood.’ Here the short sentences sound quite triumphant, and her quoting of people’s responses sounds mocking. The final two paragraphs often brought candidates back to the ambiguity of the woman’s portrayal, as she claims that, as she is ‘only an old woman’, she does not ‘mean [Inés] any harm’. However, the final paragraph suggests that she is persuading Inés to die young, before she discovers the humiliation and ‘the smell’ of being an ‘old’ body. The last line, ‘You still smell sweet’, was often seen as being particularly sinister.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/23
Prose and Unseen

Key messages

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- Successful responses focus closely on the writing of the texts and how the writer presents the meaning and content to the reader.
- Successful responses use analysis of specific references and quotations to support the points made. This is particularly important for the **(a)** questions, where candidates select their own references to answer the question.
- Successful responses to **(b)** passage questions use the prompt 'comment closely' to focus securely on analysis of the writing of the selected extract.
- While specific references to other parts of the text are not a requirement in **(b)** passage questions, knowledge of the rest of the text usually informs successful responses.
- In **Section B: Unseen**, successful responses show how the text type's literary features communicate the meaning and contribute to the reader's or audience'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

This session, examiners saw responses to all the set texts and unseen texts, each of which attracted thoughtful discussion. While nearly all candidates showed knowledge of the texts, it was evident that a sizable number approached the **(b)** passage questions on the set texts as unseen material, with little or no knowledge of the novel or short story. Significant errors of understanding therefore invariably made such responses very weak. More candidates, though, had prepared carefully and wrote thoughtful essays exploring 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. For success, 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. 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

Kiran Desai: *The Inheritance of Loss*

(a) There were too few responses to this question to make a general comment appropriate.

(b) While there were few answers on this text, most of those who had studied it chose this question. Some who attempted it clearly lacked knowledge of the novel and had little idea about the content of the passage. They lacked the context of Jemubhai's return from England and the significance of the powder puff to him. Crucially, most responses showed little awareness of the humour of the passage and the ways in which Desai draws that out from characters' misunderstanding,

mispronunciation and ransacking search for the missing item. The mixture of description and dialogue is important in creating this tone, and would have rewarded detailed discussion, but few candidates were able to give it.

Question 2

Ian McEwan: *Atonement*

(a) There were very few responses to the question on the assault on Lola, and many of these essays took a narrative approach, describing the assault itself and recounting the events which followed it to show its importance to the plot. Some answers, however, were alert to the complexity of the event's narration through Briony's perspective. Some explored the reasons for her conclusion that the culprit was Robbie, despite the uncertainty of the description, while others explored the influence of class, noting how McEwan depicts Paul Marshall manipulating not just Lola, but the police. Strong answers were also alert to the context of the assault, discussing Briony's characterisation of her cousin prior to the event and the emotions of the family who are already concerned for the more obviously vulnerable boys who go missing on that dark night. Drawing in other parts of the novel, many discussed Lola's eventual marriage to Paul, some suggesting her complicity from the moment of the assault in her agreement with Briony's identification. The marriage was often seen as the rapist 'getting away with it' (almost being 'rewarded') despite the damage done to Lola, Cecilia, Robbie and his mother. The importance of this episode as the crux of what Briony needs to 'atone' for was often discussed well.

(b) The majority of candidates opted for the passage about the breaking of the vase from Chapter 2 and most successful were those responses which concentrated on the way the moment is described in the passage, rather than narrating all the events which follow it. While there were examples of misunderstanding which suggested a lack of awareness of the novel, including those who took the description of the fountain to be a description of the vase, there were perceptive answers which explored McEwan's description of the decaying folly as emblematic of the decay of the Tallis family and their class, foreshadowing the symbolism of the vase's shattering which in turn foreshadows the breakup of the family. Examiners saw some exceptional writing, appreciating ways in which McEwan's style here, with its level of detail, suggests a memory which has been revisited and crystallised. The careful, lengthy descriptions are often contrasted with the short lines of dialogue, imperative in Robbie's case, and rejecting and scornful in Cecilia's. By examining this, and the careful descriptions of bodily movements and eyes, candidates were able to demonstrate McEwans' creation of sexual tension between Cecilia and Robbie in the incident. They were aware of Cecilia's undressing which immediately follows the passage and Briony's misinterpretation of the scene. As well as recognising the incident as a catalyst for later events in the novel, many thoughtful responses also discussed its importance as part of McEwan's narrative style and ways in which the novel explores differing perceptions. These discussed the three separate ways in which the event is narrated, here focalised from Cecilia's perspective, in the following chapter perceived by Briony from her window, and later recollected by Robbie. Such discussion was focused on the art of narrative and considered the novel's concern with narrative 'truth', getting to the heart of McEwan's interests in *Atonement*. However, it was interesting to note that comparatively few of the answers which discussed these different versions of the incident also discussed that all three turn out to be part of Briony's narration, complicating matters further.

Question 3

Stories of Ourselves Volume 1

(a) There were very few responses to this question, but some stories chosen for discussion included *My Greatest Ambition*, *To Da-duh, in Memoriam*, *The Door in the Wall*, *Games at Twilight* and *Of White Hairs and Cricket*. There was some discussion of childhood innocence in the stories by Lurie, Desai and Mistry, while Lurie, Wells and Desai offered opportunities to discuss the portrayal of childhood imagination. Perhaps the most striking were those, usually referring to Marshall, Wells, Desai and Mistry, who considered how childhood contrasts with mortality. The most successful essays not only discussed the general treatment of the topic, but looked carefully at some of the narrative methods employed, such as the self-deprecating humour of *My Greatest Ambition*; the nested narratives of *The Door in the Wall*; the narrator's descriptions of her grandmother in *To Da-duh, in Memoriam*; Ravi's perceptions of the shed in *Games at Twilight* and *Of White Hairs and Cricket*, the epiphanic moment of the narrator's glimpse of the cruelly glinting needle as his friend's father lies on his deathbed.

(b) While some answers relied on narrative summary of this episode from *Real Time* by Amit Chaudhuri, most essays showed knowledge of the story and the purpose of Mr and Mrs Mitra's car journey. These were able to use that wider knowledge effectively to help them explain some of the details of the passage. The strongest were aware that at this point in the story, the reader does not have this information, and that it is revealed in hints through this passage before being explicitly confirmed in l.48. Using this knowledge, successful candidates explored the discomfort of the journey in response to an awkward social obligation, emerging in the tension between husband and wife, depicted in their dialogue and separate thoughts. A number of candidates reflected thoughtfully on the details in the passage about Anjali's past, such as the use of the word 'appropriate' to describe her marriage, as well as her educational and societal success. Considering the Poddar family history of blessings from 'Lakshimi' and 'Saraswati', and marriage after her own degree, some candidates were led to offer their own suggestions to answer Mr Mitra's question 'Why did she do it?' The most successful essays were firmly rooted in the writing of the passage, looking at the depiction of the couple's uncertainty and discomfort during the drive, and Chaudhuri's gradual revelation of their purpose.

Question 4

Mark Twain: *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

(a) Examiners saw a large number of responses to this question which merely narrated the action of the story, asserting that it was adventurous. One of two took the title of the novel as the only evidence they needed. However, there were also successful answers which considered what the components of the adventure genre might be and considered how Twain shapes the novel in that way. This led them to consider how Twain depicts both Huck and Jim as escapees, facing new and potentially dangerous situations. This led to consideration of the physical and meteorological dangers of the journey on the Mississippi, the episodic nature of the plot and how each of these episodes leads Huck and Jim to encounter and overcome characters and situations which create crises – robbers, slave catchers, the duke and the king, the Grangerfords and Shepherdsons, Sherburn and Boggs and so on. Some thoughtful answers went on to consider the use Twain makes of the adventure story construction, and discussed both Huck's moral growth as part of the picaresque tradition and Twain's satire of the American South's social and religious attitudes.

(b) A number of responses offered only narrative summary of the passage in response to this question, while others looked only at the end of the passage and ignored the passage's and the question's references to the Grangerfords and Shepherdsons. More successful answers looked at the structure of the passage and noted the transition from death to life, from Huck being 'scared' to feeling 'mighty free and easy and comfortable'. Candidates who used their knowledge of the novel commented on the senselessness of the feud between the two families which had frequently been treated as absurd comedy before this final altercation. They noted Twain's portrayal of Huck's tenderness and respect in pulling the bodies ashore and covering their faces, and noted Huck's admission that he 'cried a little when … covering up Buck's face'. This was recognised as a moving moment, showing Huck's emotions and emphasising the horrific waste of Buck's young life. Huck's continuing fear was recognised in his avoidance of the house and retreat into the 'woods', 'swamp' and 'willows' of the landscape, 'red-hot' to escape what he now calls 'that awful country'. Sensitive answers commented on the contrast between those descriptions and 'Jim's voice', particularly his language – 'honey', 'Laws bless you, chile' – and his actions – 'Jim he grabbed me and hugged me'. The writing moves from murder and dejection to welcome and love as a striking contrast in a few paragraphs, and the 'sivilised' world is rejected in favour of the separate escape of a white boy and a Black man on a raft. The final paragraph restores their comfortable normality of homely foods, of which Huck says 'there ain't nothing in the world so good'. Candidates who were alert to the context and these shifts within the passage recognised that there is a deeper resonance to feeling 'mighty free and easy and comfortable on a raft.'

Section B: Unseen

Question 5 – Poetry

The Summit proved to be a successful poem, in that its literal meaning was accessible to most candidates, while it also offered fruitful opportunities for using that as the basis for metaphorical readings. Candidates mapped how the poem, through partially-rhymed, short-lined stanzas, describes a mountain ascent through temporary discomforts of 'sun' and 'midge', to reach 'The topmost ridge'. There is a sense of companionship

in the ‘dozen hoarded years’ between the climbers and a sense of shared success in stanza 5. Many essays noted the volta at that point in the poem, the sixth stanza beginning with ‘But’, and the darker language of the final three stanzas. These suggest that beyond the summit lie further challenges, ‘a far gulf/Unmapped, unmade,’ leading to ‘ultimate hills.’ A number of thoughtful candidates picked up the religious resonances of the references to ‘bread to eat/As white as peace,’ to ‘the water of life’ and ‘Our guerdon, bliss’, to develop a spiritual reading of the poem. A number of candidates suggested that the poem’s description of climbing a mountain served as a metaphor for life, the ‘summit’ representing life’s attainments, while the ‘shadows’ suggest ageing or death, which is what the climbers are considering as they sit ‘Chins cupped in hands’. Others wrote about the vicissitudes of life, which presents constant challenges, which means that any success is temporary and more difficulty will always lie ahead. A key to the successful development of metaphorical interpretations was that they were always based on a careful understanding of the literal meaning, and drew the metaphor from that. Candidates who started with a metaphorical reading without considering the mountain climb wrote assertive essays without close examination of how the poem is written and constructed.

Question 6 – Prose

Candidates responded well to this passage and understood its depiction of the arrival of a powerful and intimidating outsider. The most successful responses considered the narrative voice, that of an observant woman at first in awe of the newcomer but later a friend. The author’s use of natural imagery to present the unnamed woman from America was frequently noted. The comparisons with ‘an avalanche’, ‘a mountain tree’, ‘a wild and tormented stream’ and ‘a wild free buck racing against the wind’ create a powerful impression and contribute to the idea of her being one of ‘the most oddly beautiful people in the world’. The retrospective nature of the narration was frequently noted, with the penultimate paragraph beginning ‘It takes a great deal of courage to become friends with a woman like that’ and the final paragraph opening with ‘It was inevitable though that this woman and I should be friends’. The paradox between the two statements, as the narrator describes herself as ‘timid and subdued’, is developed by the penultimate paragraph and explained by the final one, noted by candidates who were alert to narrative structure. Several candidates commented, often in admiration, on the woman’s ‘shouting matches with authority’ which ‘are the terror and sensation of the village.’ The admiration is fostered by the narrator’s description of authority as oppressive, carrying ‘the weight of an age pressing down on life.’ While the ‘timid’ narrator tries ‘always to be on the right side of authority,’ she creates esteem for the American’s refusal to be cowed. Unfortunately, many essays did not consider the final paragraph in detail, but those who found time to do so were able to comment on the two long sentences from l.35 to l.39 which describe a rapid sequence of events (‘Then… Then’) ending in the women’s friendship. The ‘avalanche of wealth’ echoes the ‘avalanche’ of l.2 and it is clear that the ‘wealth’ is metaphoric, indicating the generosity of friendship. Candidates who commented carefully on the passage right to the end noted that the final sentence removes the intimidating impression first made at the opening of the passage and creates instead an image of feminine kinship, as the stranger proves to be ‘a woman who is as busy as women the world over’.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/31
Shakespeare and Drama

Key messages

- Successful responses to **(b)** passage questions focus securely on analysis of the detail of the passage presented, making it the central focus of their essay.
- Candidates should provide contexts which are relevant to the question and integrated into the overall argument of a response.
- Drama texts should be discussed as works which are normally performed, not read.

General comments

First – and perhaps most importantly – a point about rubrics and rubric infringement that needs to be underlined specifically for A Level Literature in English. The rules for the two A Level papers are different. For Paper 3 Shakespeare and Drama, candidates can choose any play from Section A: Shakespeare and any play from Section B: Drama. For Paper 4 Pre- and Post-1900 Poetry and Prose, the rubric has an additional element. Candidates select one text from Section A and one from Section B, but one of those responses must be on poetry and one on prose. The penalty for failure to meet both requirements of the Paper 4 rubric is loss of all of the marks for the weaker of the two responses. For absolute clarity, teachers are reminded that the Chaucer text counts as poetry, not prose.

This session, there were, as always, a full range of responses to these questions, covering all the mark scheme levels. Almost all candidates showed that they had read their texts with some level of appreciation. Lower-level responses often simply re-told the plot or made general remarks about character. Better answers engaged more fully with the question and with analysis of textual detail. At times, contexts (particularly with Shakespeare and O'Neill) distorted responses, either because they were too lengthy or slightly tendentious. Contexts, which are an element of **Assessment Objective 1 Knowledge and understanding**, are *only* useful when they are of direct relevance to the question in hand, and they should be used sparingly. It is perfectly legitimate to evoke a literary context such as 'Brechtian techniques' and the 'verfremdungseffekt' but it is only useful if this is then explained and explored in relation to something that an audience for this play can see in action. A passing reference to such a term is not enough to be awarded marks. Similarly, referring to a 'Feminist' or a 'Marxist' reading to demonstrate others' opinions is not, in itself, enough. Many candidates consider what 'a woman watching this play might think' rather than providing an informed discussion of a coherent Feminist reading. **Assessment Objective 5 Evaluation of opinion** compels candidates to consider other people's interpretations. Candidates are expected to use others' opinions to help them refine their own views. Many successful candidates refer to particular stage productions or videos, and this is, of course, entirely legitimate as they are a director's interpretation of the drama.

With **(a)** type questions the candidates should be clear from the outset that they need to take a strategic view – they cannot possibly hope to say everything. Many of the longest essays made this mistake, by showing a restricted ability to 'select and use relevant knowledge' a discriminator particularly relevant for **AO1**. Candidates should think hard before starting to write, planning what they want to say in order to avoid the 'and another thing' structure that is very often self-limiting. Candidates are expected to be able to make close reference to particular moments, even without the text to hand. There were a number of essays that contained no close analysis of language, though they showed knowledge and understanding of the text in general terms.

Successful responses to **(b)** passage questions balance the analysis of the passage with the whole text. It is of paramount importance for **AO1** that candidates do not simply write a general essay on the text concerned,

using the passage given as a springboard. The central focus of these answers must be on the extract presented, with close reference made to both language and action. However, candidates do need to demonstrate why this passage might be typical (or untypical) of the rest of the play. The best responses start with detail, move outwards, and then come back to the passage in virtually every paragraph. Some responses privilege contexts at the expense of thorough discussion of what is actually happening at the moment presented. If the question has a particular focus, it must be acknowledged and addressed throughout.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Shakespeare

Question 1

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Hamlet*

(a) Candidates did not lack material when approaching the question about death and dying in the play. Weaker responses were able to give list instances; stronger answers were able to see that there are different sorts of deaths, variously presented. Few responses drew attention to Horatio's analysis that we have witnessed 'casual slaughters; Of deaths put on by cunning and forc'd cause'. Only the best responses were able to discriminate clearly between, for example, the clear determination of Laertes to kill Hamlet, as opposed to Hamlet's delay and his eventual mishandling of what he had hoped to be his glorious revenge. A key discriminator in this question was the term 'dramatic presentation' and candidates needed to confront this directly. Many responses concerned themselves – successfully – with links between the presentation of death and its presentation as a theme in the play.

(b) A small number of candidates did not understand this passage and interpreted it entirely at face value, despite the evidence of the text itself. The majority of responses saw the careful verbal sparring between the three, culminating in Guildenstern's reluctant confession 'My lord, we were sent for.' There was much discussion of how the pair try to ingratiate themselves with Hamlet, and how they inspire suspicion in him because of the excesses of their greetings. Some responses wanted to deal with the scene as an instance of Hamlet's growing madness, whilst only a few discussed the possibility that Hamlet ('Denmark's a prison') is actually telling the truth in order to elicit the truth from them. A small number of responses were able to catch the tone of Hamlet's enormous enjoyment of outwitting his old friends. The best answers were able to see how this scene contributes enormously to Hamlet's growing awareness that he cannot afford to trust anyone. The question asked about the dramatic significance of the two 'here and elsewhere in the play', but very few candidates discussed Hamlet's later view that they are 'adders fang'd' or that he dismisses them readily to death with the casual phrase 'So Guildenstern and Rosencrantz go to't' without any regret on his part. They are the intentional victims of the only successful plot that Hamlet ever manages to execute.

Question 2

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *The Merchant of Venice*

(a) Candidates found much to say about Shylock's motivation in the play. Many felt that his behaviour stems almost entirely from the way that he is treated in the play because of his race. Many responses were fulsome about the language used against him early in the play. But the other side was not readily dismissed, with many responses pointing out that Shylock's 'O, my ducats! O my daughter' perhaps suggesting the order (or the equivalence) of his priorities. Many of the best responses focused on the trial scene, showing detailed awareness of Shylock's intransigence when offered money instead of his bond. Responses often talked about his tone, about his relishing of the moment of his revenge. At lower levels there was often a narrative structure to responses. At times, some responses became too much occupied with context, at the expense of close analysis of what is being presented on the stage.

(b) Responses at the lower levels often resorted to simply giving a character study of Bassanio, making scant reference to the passage presented. Other weak responses took this scene very much at face value, accepting that Bassanio is a sincere lover who gets what he deserves. More subtle responses were able to go deeper, pointing out that Bassanio's love would perhaps be

focused elsewhere if Portia were not 'a lady richly left', even though he seems sincere in his wooing of her at this moment. The best answers were able to engage in detail with the language of Bassanio's speeches, with some noting his loquaciousness, and others focusing on the way he manages the constant hyperbole expected of a lover. Some candidates also argued that the previous speeches by Portia had made it clear to him which casket to choose.

Section B: Drama

Question 3

ATHOL FUGARD: *The Train Driver and Other Plays*

(a) Responses to this question ranged widely across the three plays, with many examples given of how there are positives, despite the predominant gloom of the situations in which the protagonists find themselves. Most candidates were able to show the difficulties of the main characters within context. There was exploration of Roelf and his final understanding of Red Doek who preferred to die rather than continue living, of Veronica and her shattered dream as well as her disease, and Henry, his prejudice and his alcoholism. These were reasons enough to depict the pessimism with which the characters lived. Yet, there was a certain positivity underlined when Roelf shows understanding towards Red Doek, when the relationship between Veronica and Alfred presents a sign of hope, despite the weaknesses shown by Alfred, and when Henry overcomes his prejudice. The best responses were able to demonstrate how all this works dramatically by making close reference to detail of the text.

(b) A number of answers to this question restricted themselves simply to *The Train Driver*. In **(b)** type questions, responses must cover 'and elsewhere in the plays' if they are to achieve high marks. Some responses simply worked through the passage line by line. Some responses were able to contrast the clinical language of the newspaper cutting with the raw emotion of Roelf's experience of the same event. Answers were always able to say something about apartheid, and many were able to discuss Fugard's themes of social responsibility, human suffering and redemption in the context of the plays as a whole. Some responses dealt well with the fact that Roelf's speech is a monologue, a staged construct, which allows the speaker to reveal inner thoughts to an audience. They saw this as typical of Fugard's dramatic techniques in the other plays too.

Question 4

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

(a) Candidates responding to this question were fully aware that vulnerability and weakness are everywhere in the play. The characters themselves are all damaged by both past current and circumstances. The dynamics of most conversations in the play show how each character can be worked on by another member of the family. Responses this session frequently explored the way that the characters are victim to drugs, disease or alcohol, unable to resist addictive behaviours. Some of the best responses were able to deal with the way that O'Neill presents the weaknesses sympathetically but not uncritically. Some candidates had obviously been impacted by the parallels between O'Neill's own life and the action of the play. Whilst, of course, this is a context, it sometimes came to dominate responses at the expense of analysing the drama as a staged experience. There were some interesting wider discussions about addiction, where the men's fondness for drink is unexamined, whereas Mary's addiction is seen as a weakness.

(b) Weaker responses spent too much time on context, talking about O'Neill's family background rather than about the play as a created work of the imagination. Most responses were able to elaborate upon the tensions between Edmund and Jamie, with Jamie as older brother trying to help Edmund confront the reality of the situation they face. Many answers were able to successfully explore the stage directions as a means of interpreting the unsaid dynamics of the relationship. Some responses focused too much on the first part of the scene, ignoring the change of atmosphere that comes about when Mary enters. There was much to explore in terms of stage directions in this section, and the best responses did so with sensitivity and clear awareness of how the relationship between the three is explored. Not many responses paid attention to the last line and the stage directions that follow, a hint at how the family conceal matters through mutual unspoken consent.

Question 5

SHELAGH STEPHENSON: *An Experiment with an Air Pump*

(a) Most candidates demonstrated that they had read the play with understanding and appreciation. Even the most basic responses to this question on the Fenwicks' family life could give some account of character and theme. Some responses simply dealt with the members of the family one by one, an extremely limited approach as it did not allow for the dynamics between them. Many responses focused on the presentation of Fenwick as more interested in science than in his family. Most discussed his relationship and treatment of Susannah, noting the prejudices that stem from the fact that Susannah is more interested in literature than in science. Many of the more high-powered responses were successful in drawing a contrast between this relationship and the one between Ellen and Tom elsewhere. With reference to the two timeframes, the position of women and the changes shown through the professional status of Ellen were emphasized and contrasted to the realities of life for Susannah and her daughters.

(b) Many responses to this question were successful in combining the historical elements/context of the riot occurring outside with the nonchalance of Fenwick, whose sense of history focuses on scientific development. Responses also commented lengthily on the treatment of Susannah here and about the general treatment of women as second-class citizens in the first timeframe. Wider reference to the second timeframe and the structure of the play as a whole often helped to underline the progress made by women over the intervening centuries. In many responses the major limitation was a lack of detailed attention to the scene presented in dramatic terms. Little was made, for example, of the comic ridiculousness of the scene, with serious matters being discussed in front of Britannia, a shepherdess and a sheep, 'an Arcadian Idyll' contrasted to the realities of historical change. There was quite a lot of unanchored and tendentious discussion about Marxist and Feminist readings, little of which had traction in relation to what is being seen on the stage.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/32
Shakespeare and Drama

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demonstrate why this passage might be typical (or untypical) of the rest of the play. The best responses start with detail, move outwards, and then come back to the passage in virtually every paragraph. Some responses privilege contexts at the expense of thorough discussion of what is actually happening at the moment presented. If the question has a particular focus, it must be acknowledged and addressed throughout.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Shakespeare

Question 1

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Hamlet*

(a) Some responses to this question found it difficult to define the court, and simply assumed that it meant everyone at Elsinore. Better responses were able to focus more fully on the characters and events who watch the growing tensions in the royal family whenever they are in public or who gradually – for example Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Polonius and Ophelia, Horatio etc. – get pulled into a drama in which they have no choice but to participate but in which they can have little or no agency. The best responses were able to see that Hamlet manipulates the court throughout, most particularly in making sure that Claudius's guilt is on public display after the play within the play. In that sense, the royal court demonstrates openly and dramatically what Hamlet talks about that there is something 'rotten in the state of Denmark', something toxic that pervades, which goes beyond the behaviour of Hamlet, Claudius and Gertrude. Candidates need to be aware, as this question emphasises, that there often people on a stage who say little or nothing but are witnesses to significant action. Their reactions to what is going on, as in the final scene with Horatio's comments, are integral to the drama and should not be ignored or underestimated.

(b) Candidates warmed swiftly to this task. They were able to point out the situation – Hamlet's first public encounter with the new King and Queen – and the tensions that underline everything that is said. Many responses showed quite distinct interpretations, with some expressing sympathy for the view that Claudius and Gertrude are sincere in their wish for Hamlet to overcome his grief. More subtle responses saw all this as false and were able to explore the complexity of some of the wordplay employed by Hamlet, who knows perfectly well that he is being manipulated. The best responses were able to make links to elsewhere in the play. A few responses acutely pointed out – rightly – that this scene takes place in public and is therefore being stage-managed by Claudius and Gertrude for political purposes, hence the apparent magnanimousness of ''tis a loving and a fair reply', and Claudius noting that Hamlet's reply is 'gentle and unforc'd' is a steer on how Claudius directs the scene to be perceived by the courtiers.

Question 2

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *The Merchant of Venice*

(a) At the lower end, a number of candidates addressed this question by providing a character study of each of the named people. More strategic responses were aware that the Antonio and Shylock interact extensively in the play and that their roles are similar in some senses, with Shylock simply paying back in kind for the insults that he has had to endure from Antonio: there was often focus on Act 4, Scene 1, where the two of them trade insults. Many responses pointed out that Shylock was not entirely unfair in expecting his 'pound of flesh' and how Venetian law is corrupted to allow him to escape his promises, whereas Shylock (rightly but naively) expects the law to apply to all. Elsewhere, Antonio was often seen as generous and concerned for others; Shylock was not, with even his relationship with Jessica characterised as selfish. Both were seen as much concerned with money. A small number of responses became side-tracked onto the relationship between Antonio and Bassanio. There was some useful analysis of the trial scene, the moment when the pair's different values and expectations become most explicit.

(b) Only the best responses noted that the passage provided for analysis is the very end of the play, and that it leaves some awkward questions about faithfulness and integrity hanging in the air, rather than being the full-bodied happy ending of a typical comedy. Very few responses dealt with the summary dismissal of Shylock, who returns to being thought of a stereotype, even though the action of the play as a whole has suggested something else. Many responses were able to see that

the tone of the scene is one of reconciliation and forgiveness, despite the business of the rings; the best responses saw that the tone is somewhat forced at times. There was often discussion of Portia and her obviously intentional refusal to return to being simply 'a lady richly left' – she's far too articulate and forceful for that, and she now speaks to the men on equal terms. Weaker responses gave an account of the scene but often found it difficult to relate the action and language of the scene to things that had gone before.

Section B: Drama

Question 3

ATHOL FUGARD: *The Train Driver and Other Plays*

(a) Responses to this question mainly dealt with *The Train Driver* because of its obvious treatment of a guilty conscience. At the lower end, some responses focused on only one of the plays, thus ensuring that the marks could only gain – at maximum – Level 3 because they were, undoubtedly 'partial,' as described in the mark scheme. Better responses were able to deal with the detail of both plays, talking about how, for example, Roelf's guilt is very complex because of his feeling that although he was the cause of Red Doek's death, he was not responsible for it. Thus, he is presented to an audience as a victim himself, as his life has been ruined by circumstances beyond his control. Responses that explored *Have You Seen Us* were able to reflect on Henry's guilt over his behaviour and the dramatic treatment of prejudice that echoes throughout the play. The best responses were able to make something of context, paralleling antisemitism and racial prejudice across the plays.

(b) Most responses to this extract from *The Train Driver*, Scene 6 focused on the various ways in which Roelf and Simon bond during the course of the play, with much made of their discussion of food as a symbol of societal unfairness. There were discussions about how the play reaches across racial divides, about the continuing problems of post-apartheid South Africa. Better responses were able to talk about how dialogue is used throughout Fugard's plays as a means of dramatizing character.

Question 4

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

(a) Most responses to this question showed a willingness to engage with the detail of the text and argue that there is much meaning that is made in this play through characters' actions, or, indeed through their speeches where they are talking about something in order to avoid confronting what is really on their minds. The best responses were able to cite particular examples of looks given, gestures mutually understood. At the lower end, some responses were only really able to engage with the more superficial aspects of the question, often resorting to plot-telling and commenting on the various addictions of the family members. There was much discussion of O'Neill's family and personal experience, a context which sometimes took away from what is actually being presented in the play.

(b) Most responses to this passage from Act 1 focused – rightly – on ways in which O'Neill develops the relationship between Jamie and his father, here and elsewhere in the play. There was a lot of discussion about how Tyrone's default position is one of self-righteousness. Many responses dwelt on how alike the two are and on how this passage demonstrates a growing awareness on Jamie's part of some of what his father has been through, evinced by the final 'I've felt the same way, Papa.' Some responses were able to suggest some of the contexts of Tyrone's behaviour in the play as a whole – his Irish background, his longing for security and stability, his tendency towards slightly exaggerated theatricality which comes from a life in show business. Less good responses tended to give an account of the scene, without ever really getting into the detail of language and action.

Question 5

SHELAGH STEPHENSON: *An Experiment with an Air Pump*

(a) Responses to this question were able to see how Armstrong exploits Isobel in terms of his social superiority and his ability to sweet-talk her. There was much discussion of the way their relationship

fits in with the theme of the ethics of scientific discovery in both the historical and contemporary parts of the play. Many responses mentioned Roget as a moral focus, a contrast to Armstrong. Weaker answers responded very personally, simply making reference to Armstrong as a self-centred, self-interested villain. Many responses were able to outline a case without really being able to cite specific examples of text that would have supported the arguments being made. There was some useful personal response to the discovery of Isobel's fate as it is presented visually in the play and then talked about in the contemporary scenes.

(b) Many responses to this passage from Act 1, Scene 1 focused on the contrast between the riots going on outside the Fenwick's house and the different sorts of revolution that are going on within, with must discussion centred on the changing role of women between the two timeframes of the play. Good responses made wider connections to how Fenwick treats Susannah both here and in other scenes. Responses also ranged from underlining the frustration of Armstrong in not being able to leave the house, and Fenwick's arrogance as a scientist who finds fault with everyone else. There was much focus on the patronizing attitude of Fenwick and the obsession of Armstrong in connection to the experiment of Dr Farleigh which foreshadows the death of Isobel. A few candidates were able to point to the humorous tone of much of the piece by drawing attention to the silliness of the lecture titles that are offered, Fenwick's snide comments about Percy Fellowes, and his feisty dismissal, 'Bugger botany', towards the end. Historical contexts were often well adduced. Some candidates saw that the passage could be seen in different ways, particularly in retrospect when the issue of a 'woman of thirty years, enormously malformed skull ...' becomes real through the death of Isobel in the mistaken name of scientific exploration. A few responses noted Armstrong's evasiveness with 'Dr Farleigh is giving ... a demonstration.' Some responses linked the passage interestingly with the opening scene of the play. Weaker responses did not deal fully enough with the detail of the passage presented.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/33
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General comments

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This session, there were, as always, a full range of responses to these questions, covering all the mark scheme levels. Almost all candidates showed that they had read their texts with some level of appreciation. Lower-level responses often simply re-told the plot or made general remarks about character. Better answers engaged more fully with the question and with analysis of textual detail. At times, contexts (particularly with Shakespeare and O'Neill) distorted responses, either because they were too lengthy or slightly tendentious. Contexts, which are an element of **Assessment Objective 1 Knowledge and understanding**, are *only* useful when they are of direct relevance to the question in hand, and they should be used sparingly. It is perfectly legitimate to evoke a literary context such as 'Brechtian techniques' and the 'verfremdungseffekt' but it is only useful if this is then explained and explored in relation to something that an audience for this play can see in action. A passing reference to such a term is not enough to be awarded marks. Similarly, referring to a 'Feminist' or a 'Marxist' reading to demonstrate others' opinions is not, in itself, enough. Many candidates consider what 'a woman watching this play might think' rather than providing an informed discussion of a coherent Feminist reading. **Assessment Objective 5 Evaluation of opinion** compels candidates to consider other people's interpretations. Candidates are expected to use others' opinions to help them refine their own views. Many successful candidates refer to particular stage productions or videos, and this is, of course, entirely legitimate as they are a director's interpretation of the drama.

With **(a)** type questions the candidates should be clear from the outset that they need to take a strategic view – they cannot possibly hope to say everything. Many of the longest essays made this mistake, by showing a restricted ability to 'select and use relevant knowledge' a discriminator particularly relevant for **AO1**. Candidates should think hard before starting to write, planning what they want to say in order to avoid the 'and another thing' structure that is very often self-limiting. Candidates are expected to be able to make close reference to particular moments, even without the text to hand. There were a number of essays that contained no close analysis of language, though they showed knowledge and understanding of the text in general terms.

Successful responses to **(b)** passage questions balance the analysis of the passage with the whole text. It is of paramount importance for **AO1** that candidates do not simply write a general essay on the text concerned, using the passage given as a springboard. The central focus of these answers must be on the extract presented, with close reference made to both language and action. However, candidates do need to

demonstrate why this passage might be typical (or untypical) of the rest of the play. The best responses start with detail, move outwards, and then come back to the passage in virtually every paragraph. Some responses privilege contexts at the expense of thorough discussion of what is actually happening at the moment presented. If the question has a particular focus, it must be acknowledged and addressed throughout.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Shakespeare

Question 1

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Hamlet*

(a) A small number of responses to this question simply held that Hamlet is a victim of events and of his family circumstances. Better answers were able to see that there is something that holds him back throughout, an inability to act which might be seen as a tragic fault. A small number of (very good) responses argued that he is never able to become the tragic hero of his imaginings because the events of the play – either planned by others or coincidental – deprive him of the revenge he contemplates at such length. A number of responses did not really engage fully enough with the textual details. Very few candidates tried to define the term 'tragic hero' before moving into the body of their responses, although this would have been a helpful approach. The best responses balanced the terms of the question, illustrating points along the way and showing constant awareness of the text as a play. Few responses were able to engage with the views of others on this play.

(b) Many responses to this extract from Act 3, Scene 1 did not explicitly note that Hamlet's discussions with Ophelia (lines 1–43) are plainly being overheard by the King and Polonius ('You need not tell us what Lord Hamlet said;/ We heard it all,' lines 74–5). What's more, Ophelia knows that they are being overheard, and is plainly fishing for information about Hamlet's state of mind. And Hamlet is probably aware that Ophelia has been set up, so he too is shaping his speech in particular ways for Polonius and the King's benefit. For those candidates who were able to articulate these complications, discussions often led towards discussions of spying and distrust in the play, with candidates pointing out that Hamlet can trust no one around him. Many responses ignored Ophelia's soliloquy (lines 44–55), a moment that is central to any complex view about whether Hamlet is truly mad. Responses that dealt with the speech often saw Hamlet's madness as feigned, his method to protect himself. A failure to think strategically about the passage sometimes meant that candidates never got to the conversation between Polonius and the King and the chilling ending of 'Madness in great ones must not unwatch'd go.'

Question 2

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *The Merchant of Venice*

(a) Too few responses to comment.

(b) Most responses to this question about candidates' understanding of Shylock were able contextualise the passage from Act 4, Scene 1 in terms of the action of the play as a whole. Responses often showed sympathy for Shylock's call for justice ('What judgment shall I dread, doing no wrong?'), though there was awareness too of his intransigence ('But say it is my humour'). This intransigence was often contrasted to Bassanio's remark that Shylock is an 'unfeeling man', something which the opening speech plainly demonstrates not to be the case. The best answers were able to illuminate the dramatic tension of the scene through close reference to the language: Shylock has 'a certain loathing' towards Antonio, but Antonio demonstrates why this is the case by his constant reference to 'the Jew' and 'His Jewish heart'. Some responses discussed the rule of law in Venice more widely in the play, seeing it as adaptable and corrupt in the face of Shylock's justifiable cry 'I stand for judgment; answer; shall I have it?'

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

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

(a) Responses to this question were able to trace the history of the Tyrone family, pointing out that each of them brings a personal history to bear on the events of the present. Much was made of Tyrone's impoverished upbringing and his continuing emphasis on economy. Similarly, his tendency to dramatize was raised, and some responses pointed out that his sons have inherited this capacity. The loss of Mary's baby also featured widely because of the family's continuing reluctance to face her past as a means of explaining her addiction. The strongest responses dealt well with specific detail from the text in order to demonstrate dramatic effects. Weaker answers often relied on details of O'Neill's own life, a context which, while relevant, needs to be woven into a sustained argument, rather than framing the response. Only the better responses made any attempt at considering the views of others.

(b) Most candidates were aware that this extract from Act 4 is one of the moments where Tyrone demonstrates a degree of honesty and frankness in his dealings with a family member. Some responses noted that much of the scene seems like a moment where he is reflecting without really paying much attention to being listened to. In that sense, as an ex-actor, he is demonstrating his ability with the soliloquy, thus showing an element of the meta-theatricality of the play as a means of characterisation. There was some reflection on how Tyrone, even at his most sympathetic, wants to dominate and tell a tale. Most responses noted that this was one of the few moments of real and sincere intimacy between family members in the play. Again, there was often focus on O'Neill's own life, often at the expense of examining in detail what is happening in the extract.

Question 5

SHELAGH STEPHENSON: *An Experiment with an Air Pump*

(a) In their responses to this question about women's ambitions and aspirations in the play, candidates were able to make significant points about the changing roles of women by drawing attention to the structure of the play. In the 18th century, the women are portrayed as victims or as playthings, with men simply ignoring the idea that they may have aspirations and ambitions. Discussions took in Susannah's plain frustrations with her husband and the fact that their daughters are able to do little more than organise pastoral masques, despite their articulated views that they would like to do something more challenging. The contrast with Ellen in the 20th century was inevitable: she earns the money, does the important job in the family. Her husband concerns himself with the arts and literature, whilst she is occupied with the serious business of scientific discovery. At times, responses suffered from insufficient focus on particular moments, and lack of demonstration of where the issues raised become energised dramatically in the play.

(b) This passage from Act 2, Scene 3 often, understandably, evoked strong personal responses in candidate essays. Candidates highlighted the double guilt of Armstrong, who uses his position both as a man and as someone of a higher class to exploit and mislead Isobel ('of course I don't bloody love her'), a treatment that eventually, tragically, leads to her taking her own life. Responses were quick to note the disapproval that is so forcefully articulated by Roget. There was much reference to – and disapproval of – Armstrong's giggles and laughter. A small number of candidates failed to recognise that Isobel overhears what is being said towards the end of the extract. Armstrong's perverse (and perverted) motives for examining Isobel's body were often ignored.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/41
Pre- and Post-1900 Poetry and Prose

Key messages

- **AO5 Evaluation of opinions** (O) is the ability to discuss and evaluate different opinions and interpretations of texts. It should be integrated into arguments relevant to the question.
- Contexts relate to knowledge and understanding and should be accurate and supportive of arguments.
- It is vital that candidates study **one** prose text and **one** poetry text. One of the texts studied must be written pre-1900 and one written post-1900.

General comments

First – and perhaps most importantly – a point about rubrics and rubric infringement that needs to be underlined specifically for A Level Literature in English. The rules for the two A Level papers are different. For Paper 3 Shakespeare and Drama, candidates can choose any play from Section A: Shakespeare and any play from Section B: Drama. For Paper 4 Pre- and Post-1900 Poetry and Prose, the rubric has an additional element. Candidates select one text from Section A and one from Section B, but one of those responses must be on poetry and one on prose. The penalty for failure to meet both requirements of the Paper 4 rubric is loss of all of the marks for the weaker of the two responses. For absolute clarity, teachers are reminded that the Chaucer text counts as poetry, not prose.

Examiners once again commended the enthusiasm and engagement shown by most candidates towards the texts studied. Personal exploration of ideas, themes, and concerns was often dynamic and thought-provoking, reflecting confidence in analysis and evaluation across all ability levels. This indicated that candidates gained meaningful insight and enjoyment from their reading and study of the novels and poems.

AO5 response is an important aspect of the mark scheme for this paper. Its use varied this series in terms of clarity, evidence and quality. This Assessment Objective requires candidates to consider the presence and influence of other interpretations, evaluating their validity and significance. However, **AO5** was sometimes forgotten or reduced to name-dropping of critics. The most effective references to other opinions and interpretations are smoothly incorporated within arguments. Merely name-dropping terms such as 'Post colonial' or 'Marxist' readings without informed discussion is inadequate. Some candidates reduced these views to basic statements without connecting them to a coherent argument. Candidates should use others' opinions to refine their own views. These can be linked to a personal opinion where a candidate weighs up the credibility or viability of each interpretation and argues a preference for one in particular. Referring to film versions of a novel is legitimate, as they represent a particular view or approach by the screenwriter or director. Comments made in class discussion can be referenced but it is important to ensure that these do not drift from the question or lack critical substance. Candidates should also consider what is practically possible in terms of critical views, for example, referring to Aristotle as a critic of *Wide Sargasso Sea* is obviously anachronistic and inaccurate. Another example wrote at length about how Whitman was influenced by E M Forster when Forster was only thirteen when Whitman died.

The application of knowledge and understanding of context varied significantly among candidates. Some provided incorrect comments that undermined their answers, while others included irrelevant biographical details about writers. Some candidates missed the opportunity to consider the influence of contexts on the works studied. References to context should be included to inform the reading of a text and may involve literary, social, historical, or cultural aspects. Candidates should use context to support relevant arguments linked to the question. An example would be references to the influences of Transcendentalism and Romanticism in relation to Whitman's style and methods or exploring the impact of the American Civil War on his views of conflict when writing about *Leaves of Grass*. Including isolated details such as Whitman's dates of birth and death do not constitute contextual reference and are merely examples of background material.

In **(a)** questions it is essential that candidates read the question carefully to ensure the focus is established from the start. Examiners commented that a number of 'false starts' were seen where candidates had jumped into an answer to the **(a)** question without fully realising its demands. Planning is important to ensure a considered view is taken, with some good candidates this year using a thesis statement in their introduction to distil their arguments. Sometimes candidates start an answer but run out of steam as they have not planned a comprehensive way forward for their argument. This can lead to blandness, repetition or shallow, unsupported responses. Conversely, some candidates have too much to say and try to write down all they know. In the confines of an exam, this is not possible. Examiners saw a number of scripts this series that offered very long, but incomplete, essays or sprawling answers that lacked a clear thread of argument. Candidates should be urged to remember that 'select and use relevant knowledge' is a discriminator that runs throughout the mark scheme. Weaker answers to **(a)** questions often lacked specific analysis of detail or use of supporting quotations and references. The strongest essays presented strategic and focused arguments with integrated support and coherent threads of argument.

The **(b)** questions require candidates to demonstrate an awareness of where the extract fits within the wider work. For poetry, this means contextualising the poem within the poet's broader work, referencing the collection and characteristic features. Candidates should be able to demonstrate why the passage or poem given is representative or unrepresentative of the rest of the text or collection/selection. The best responses start with detail, move outwards, and then come back to the passage as a pattern of approach throughout their answer. There was some evidence this session of answers treating poems as unseen texts, failing to meet the specification requirements. Candidates must consider poetry as a body of work of which individual poems are a part. Some candidates do not deal with the passage or poem in sufficient detail and sometimes focus more on other poems or parts of the prose text. The selection of a **(b)** question means that candidates must give the passage (or poem), and question provided their closest attention, with other parts of the text drawn in to support, contextualise and illustrate. Once again, it is important that candidates read the accompanying questions carefully as some of these have a thematic or character-based focus, while others reflect a broader approach to characteristic methods and effects of the writer.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Pre-1900 Poetry and Prose

Question 1

JANE AUSTEN: *Pride and Prejudice*

(a) Most candidates focused effectively on the relationship between Charlotte Lucas and Mr Collins. Less able candidates concentrated on plot and characterisation while more able candidates discussed the significance of the relationship concerning Austen's message about marriage and historical context. Some candidates erroneously referred to Austen writing in 'Elizabethan' or 'Victorian' times. The specific nature of Austen's context is relevant to the novel's meaning and therefore has an impact on the quality of arguments. Solid answers contrasted the relationship of Charlotte and Mr Collins with others in the novel. Most candidates recognised the difficulties of Charlotte's situation and quoted her pragmatic views. Better answers addressed Charlotte's situation at Hunsford. Weaker answers tended to over-estimate the social status of Mr Collins, portraying him as higher in society than is actually the case. These candidates often briefly discussed the contextual circumstances of the marriage between Charlotte and Mr Collins. Some used comparisons between Charlotte and Elizabeth to explore Elizabeth's relationship with Darcy or as a springboard to a narrative discussion of the plot. Some candidates took a narrative approach, recounting Mr Collins' relationships. Others focused on Charlotte and Mr Collins as individuals, with varying degrees of commentary on their married life, as observed by Elizabeth during her visit. More able candidates examined the relationship as a means of exploring social, economic, and cultural themes in the novel, often eloquently expanding on the role of women in society. Some of these candidates highlighted Charlotte's reasons for marrying Mr Collins, clearly embedding them in historical contexts. Thoughtful comments were made on how this marriage serves as a foil to other marriages and as a source of humour, including Austen's famous irony.

(b) Most candidates approached the passage with understanding. L3 and L4 answers generally identified themes of class and marriage, with some connecting these themes to other episodes in the novel. Good responses highlighted the conflict between genuine emotions (as seen in Bingley, Lizzie and Darcy) versus appearances (exemplified by Miss Bingley and Mrs Hurst). Some candidates pointed out the greed and sloth of Mr Hurst and Lizzie's autonomy in walking three

miles, connecting this to Mary Wollstonecraft. However, some added knowledge about characters like Wickham or Mrs Bennet without linking it to the passage. Less able candidates commented on the snobbery, pettiness, and prejudice of the Bingley sisters and compared these traits to their brother's attitude. The passage provided opportunities for able candidates to explore Darcy's shifting opinions toward Elizabeth, his apparent snobbery, and the interconnectedness of the passage with other novel strands involving the Bingleys, Jane, Darcy and Wickham. Most candidates commented on Miss Bingley's snobbish attitude toward Elizabeth. More able candidates analysed Elizabeth's break from gender roles of the time. However, many candidates confused Elizabeth and Jane Bennet's identities and struggled with understanding the relative social status of the characters. The misunderstanding of the English class system, particularly the belief that Caroline Bingley was aristocracy and Elizabeth Bennet was poor, hampered their ability to produce top-quality answers. Only the best answers engaged with the perspectives of both Darcy and Bingley. There were frequent mentions of 'the patriarchy' and strongly feminist views attributed to the author. The question was a popular choice, eliciting perceptive comments on manners, Regency society, boredom, gossip, outward appearances, and close analysis of dialogue and free indirect speech. Many candidates carefully discussed the themes of pride, prejudice, and class concerns.

Question 2

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

(a) This question proved to be accessible, with candidates mostly focusing on relationships between May and Januarie and May and Damyan. More able candidates also discussed Januarie, Placebo, and Justinus, as well as Pluto and Proserpina, leading to strong, well-structured answers. However, the richness of material on Januarie and May's marriage sometimes left insufficient time to explore May and Damyan's relationship. The question was reasonably popular, but many candidates struggled with finding supporting references from the text. Several used the passage from **Question (b)** to support their arguments. Some candidates appeared to use a translation of Chaucer and quoted from it. Some responses showed partial understanding of the different relationships, but were undeveloped and narrative at times, partially analysing symbolism like the garden and the pear. Most explored the central relationships of Januarie/May and Damyan/May, with some exploring the relationships between the gods. Answers often became general discussions of Januarie and May and Damyan and May. A few candidates discussed the significance of friendship between Januarie, Placebo, and Justinus, and some included the relationships between the gods. Better answers focused on the literary context of the fabliau or courtly love which worked well, especially in exploring how Damyan's lovesickness connects with courtly love, subverted by May's actions. The strongest answers utilised the context of the marriage debate and analysed the impact of the Merchant's own marriage experience on his tale. Candidates working at Levels 5 and 6 often quoted extensively to support their views. The range of critical views available on relationships in the tale meant that references were often fully relevant and advanced arguments effectively. Perceptive responses used detailed references from the entire text, considering relationships between Januarie and May, and why May preferred Damyan. They assuredly used varying interpretations and knowledge of other texts Chaucer was aware of, such as De Coitu and his writings on impotence.

(b) Most candidates engaged appropriately with the presentation of Januarie in the extract, making increasingly sound links to context and gender roles of the time, as well as connections to the wider poem. Effective work was noted on the 'warm wax' metaphor in relation to gender expectations. Answers to the **(b)** question tended to be less strong than those to the **(a)** question, with fewer opportunities taken to incorporate material from elsewhere in the tale. However, the passage offered rich material for discussion, and almost all candidates identified and analysed imagery and ideas within the passage. Contextually, candidates showed an understanding of the role of women and ideas on chivalry, though these discussions were, in many cases, somewhat thin. Overall, candidates engaged well with the extract's presentation of Januarie, utilising language effects and contextual references to explore themes of gender roles and religious hypocrisy, though there was a notable difference in the depth and breadth of analysis between the **(a)** and **(b)** questions. The best answers were very well supported, convincingly and perceptively incorporating wider ideas into a close study of the passage.

Question 3

JOHN DONNE: Selected Poems

(a) Few candidates attempted this question, but those who did tended to be ambitious and were generally well-prepared, exploring Donne's religious beliefs through various stages of his life and across multiple poems. Some candidates selected the *Holy Sonnets*, though analysis did not exceed Level 3 in most cases. One candidate attempted to use *The Flea*, referencing marriage and the marriage temple. There were some useful links to wider context, especially focusing on Donne's religious beliefs, with discussions of poems including *Batter my Heart*. Although the question was not as popular as **3(b)**, it produced some very good work from candidates. One particularly notable response used the *Holy Sonnets* and *The Canonisation*, employing T.S. Eliot as a springboard to discuss religion and Donne. This approach examined different stages of Donne's life in relation to the three poems.

(b) This question was quite popular and reasonably well-handled. Candidates generally understood the poem and its context, and most candidates demonstrated a decent understanding of the conceit. There was some excellent analysis of the poem supported by observation and knowledge. Less successful answers failed to range more widely through the collection, indicating a need for broader knowledge of connections and links between poems in the selection. Many candidates made good links to the context of the time period, especially regarding male-female relationships and Donne's biography. There were useful references to other poems including *The Flea, To His Mistress Going to Bed,* and *The Good Morrow*. The best answers included references to Donne's presentation of relationships elsewhere in the collection, though sometimes these references were insubstantial. Some very good responses looked at context and critics, discussing the arrogance of tone and using apposite literary techniques. Candidates often used the symbolism of the sun as a central image for love and time, demonstrating a good understanding of the poem and its context, such as exploration and the idea of a heliocentric universe replacing Ptolemy.

Question 4

THOMAS HARDY: *Far from the Madding Crowd*

(a) Despite the potential richness of the question, few responses were seen with most attempts offering largely narrative-based treatments. Candidates knew the novel but seemed restrained by their knowledge, unable to explore how love is both affirmative and destructive. This led to solid responses with few excellent essays. Overall, while there were competent comparisons of characters' love for Bathsheba and her attitudes towards them, many responses lacked depth and originality. Answers were structured to describe relationships one by one, with few interesting ideas emerging and some answers drifting into plot. The best responses took a strategic view, using critics effectively, with one example citing Grace Lapointe who described Boldwood as a 19th-century 'Incel'. This candidate also referenced a poem from the 1912 series to comment on Emma Gifford and Hardy, showcasing many critical views and insightful discussions.

(b) There were few attempts at this question. Most candidates were able to identify the context of the passage and how it revealed Gabriel's vulnerability as a man alone. Some explored how the incident marked a stage in the relationship between Gabriel and Bathsheba. However, there was generally a lack of analysis of the language used in the passage. Some candidates discussed the significance of the encounter, the contrast between heat and cold, and especially Gabriel's impression of Bathsheba, such as the sensation of having his head upon her dress. Bathsheba's bold, transgressive behaviour was also noted. Good responses often noted the use of nature in the extract and the beginning of the relationship between Gabriel and Bathsheba. Many candidates were critical of Bathsheba, seeing her as fickle.

Question 5

BRAM STOKER: *Dracula*

(a) This question was less popular than the **(b)** question, with most responses being straightforward or competent and a few perceptive. Candidates often prefaced discussions of violence with context, such as ideas of colonisation and Victorian fear of the 'other'. Many candidates focused on the role of Dracula in terms of violence, with some also discussing the presentation of Lucy as 'The Bloofer Lady'. While there were sound answers, some candidates struggled to quote the detail of violent incidents, limiting their ability to comment effectively on Stoker's methods. Despite this, the text's popularity was reinforced by its engagement with ideas of vampires and zombies. The use of religious items as weapons and the symbolism of the stake driven into Lucy were discussed by

some candidates, with most interpreting it as phallic and a punishment for her lack of purity in wishing she could marry three men. The term 'degradation' was frequently mentioned, and higher-level candidates effectively used critics to support their arguments. The best answers connected the violence in the novel to broader themes and contextual fears, demonstrating a nuanced understanding of the text.

(b) This question was popular, with many strong answers discussing gender expectations, Victorian society and the concept of the 'New Woman' which was well discussed, eliciting a range of responses. Some saw Mina as the ideal Victorian woman – a mother figure who ministers to the men – while others challenged this view by highlighting her intellectual feats, like memorising train timetables. Some candidates were able to discuss how Mina is pigeonholed and patronised by society into a limiting role. Successful candidates used the contrast with Lucy to develop their arguments and effectively employed critical views and approaches. Several candidates made good use of *The Contested Castle: A Critical Study of the Gothic Novel,* enriching their arguments. The best answers provided a nuanced discussion of Mina's character and the societal expectations imposed on her, using a variety of perspectives. While there was strong engagement with the text and good contextual work in most answers, weaker responses were limited by a lack of depth and tendency to repetition. Among the least successful answers there was significant confusion about Mina's role, with some candidates misinterpreting her as flirtatious.

Question 6

WALT WHITMAN: Selected poems from *Leaves of Grass*

(a) There were only a few responses to this question. Candidates who attempted it referred to appropriate poems and incorporated ideas of transcendentalism. The oak tree in Louisiana was interpreted as reflecting homosexuality and celebrating 'manly love,' with the broken twig seen as a phallic symbol. Candidates showed some creativity in their critical approaches, but a more comprehensive grasp of the longer poems would have enhanced their analyses. The least successful answers struggled to cover the requirement for three poems and lacked depth and development. One very good response made a case for a Marxist critique, focusing on ideas of nature and the human soul.

(b) This question was extremely popular. Weaker candidates often focused too much on the extract without sufficient analysis of literary techniques. Some merely identified the term 'conflict', occasionally listing language features without discussing their effects. This tendency for feature-spotting without commenting on the effects of those features was reported by several examiners. There were two distinct interpretations of the poem: one viewing it as a celebratory call to arms, and the other as a call for peace and laying down of arms. The latter interpretation was more effectively handled, incorporating deeper analysis of language, irony and pathos. Some candidates were confident in their analysis but overly concentrated on the extract, missing opportunities to reference the wider selection of poems effectively. All candidates linked the poem to the context of the Civil War with varying degrees of success. Many responses noted the use of multiple questions and commands, especially in the last stanza, but did not always fully explore their significance. Links to other poems, including *O Captain! My Captain!* were common, though sometimes these references were limited and lacked thorough analysis. The best answers balanced detailed analysis of the set poem with insightful connections to other works and historical context.

Section B: Post-1900 Poetry and Prose

Question 7

SUJATA BHATT: Selected poems from *Point No Point*

(a) There were very few responses to this question, and these tended to be either limited or confident, reflecting a significant disparity in depth of analysis and understanding. Most essays made useful discussions and links to the author's life, particularly Bhatt's relationship with her mother and grief over her death. Less successful essays treated the theme of death in a straightforward and obvious manner, while confident essays recognised a broader spectrum of death. Little evidence of reference to critics or different interpretations was seen within answers.

(b) This was a very popular question with a wide range of achievement seen. The least able candidates struggled to make coherent sense of the poem while stronger candidates showcased a

full range of analytical skills. Weaker answers focused largely on literal meanings and often resorted to paraphrasing. They struggled to engage fully with the poem, often making disconnected comments on individual lines. Most candidates, including those working in the middle of the mark range, made links to other poems, such as *Garlic in War and Peace*. Various interpretations were presented, with one candidate viewing the poem as an allegory about migrants adjusting to an alien culture. References to critical views were not always closely linked to the given poem, *The Stinking Rose*. Stronger candidates effectively used quotations, engaged deeply with the poem's themes and demonstrated a wide-ranging understanding of the text. The best answers offered comprehensive analysis, incorporating language, poetic features and supporting references from other poems. They were able to discuss the poem's sensuality and connect it to themes of identity.

Question 8

LOUISE GLŰCK: Selected poems from *The Wild Iris*

(a) Very few answers were seen to this question, and most responses were generalised. Many candidates did not seem to know the poems well or understand the ways in which plants are presented. Some candidates were able to select appropriate poems for their responses. Several responses effectively used the symbolism of *The Hawthorn Tree* to discuss the cycle of life and death. The best responses included many quotations to support their perceptive ideas. Successful answers addressed ideas of divinity, nature and human destructiveness.

(b) This question was more popular than the **(a)** option and a wide range of ability was demonstrated in responses seen. Some candidates seemed to approach the poem with guesswork and intuition while others had clearly studied it closely and offered considered discussion. Less successful responses simply paraphrased the poem, leading to a lack of depth and development. Some responses contained long, unsupported assertions and general philosophising not specifically applied to the text. Few responses made use of illustrative material from the wider collection of poems. Better responses identified the tone well and explored multiple interpretations of the speaker, such as God or a parent. These answers often focused on the divine and nature with confident and perceptive exploration of Gluck's methods, identifying aspects of tone well and considering various interpretations and ideas. These effective answers provided supporting evidence with conviction and authority.

Question 9

JAMES JOYCE: *Dubliners*

(a) Candidates generally engaged with the stories effectively but showed varying levels of depth and context in their responses. The most popular story was *The Boarding House*, which candidates explored thoroughly, particularly focusing on themes related to money and the character of Mrs Mooney. This story provided a rich ground for discussion, linking well with broader themes of poverty and stagnation in Dublin. However, candidates working in the lower and middle ranges of the mark scheme often struggled when selecting and discussing a second story. While some used *Araby*, others explored *Counterparts* or *A Mother*. The discussions on these stories tended to be less developed compared to *The Boarding House*. Candidates faced challenges in drawing meaningful comparisons or in-depth evaluation for their second choice, indicating a need for a broader or more nuanced understanding of the texts. There was also some confusion about the historical and social context of Ireland, including aspects of Catholicism and colonization, which impacted the quality of the responses.

(b) This was a popular question, and a range of achievement was seen. The theme of paralysis was a central focus in many candidates' responses, particularly when discussing the passage. However, engagement with the passage itself was limited, with less successful candidates struggling to move beyond a basic plot summary. Analysis of language and deeper textual exploration were generally lacking. Better candidates effectively discussed the presentation of characters like Gretta and Michael, as well as narrative viewpoints and behavioural contrasts. One exemplary response distinguished itself by integrating contextual knowledge, critical perspectives and thematic analysis, particularly focusing on paralysis and the character of Gabriel. This candidate also made connections to other works, such as *Ulysses*, and used a wide range of critical viewpoints to support their analysis. Overall, while many responses showed solid understanding, particularly of character and theme, there was a notable disparity in the depth of analysis and personal

engagement with the material. The most effective answers were those that not only examined the story in isolation but also linked it to broader themes and texts.

Question 10

TONI MORRISON: *Beloved*

(a) This was a very popular text, and this question on motherhood attracted a large number of answers. A broad range of responses was seen, predominantly at Level 2 or 3, often focusing on narrative summary rather than deeper analysis. Candidates frequently identified Baby Suggs, Sethe and Denver as key mother figures but demonstrated varying degrees of understanding and depth in their analysis. A number of responses had a loose grasp of the concept of motherhood, with some candidates simplifying complex themes or using informal language such as 'kids' instead of 'children'. There was also a tendency for some candidates to be negative about Sethe's decision to kill Beloved, reflecting a lack of nuanced understanding of the character's motivations and Morrison's intentions. Some responses effectively examined the different maternal figures in the novel, including Denver and the idea of nurturing. The best answers explored the broader implications of Sethe's role as a mother and the impact of slavery on these roles, often linking this exploration to the trauma and memory themes in the novel. A notable minority saw the novel through the lens of magic realism, which added an interesting dimension to the analysis. The most insightful responses demonstrated a deep comprehension of Morrison's narrative techniques, such as its fragmentary structure and stream of consciousness, and how these reflect Sethe's psychological state.

(b) This question was not as popular as the a) option but the focus on Baby Suggs in this passage attracted a range of responses. The depth and quality of responses varied, with stronger candidates making broader connections to the novel and its themes while weaker candidates focused more on narrative summary and plot, offering less analytical depth. Often, they struggled to understand the passage or lapsed into repetitive discussions of Baby Suggs' affirmations and failed to connect the passage to the wider themes and context of the novel. More able candidates examined the presentation of Baby Suggs as a preacher, delving into themes of healing and reconciliation after slavery. Candidates who linked the extract to the novel as a whole, produced more effective analysis.

Question 11

JEAN RHYS: *Wide Sargasso Sea*

(a) This question on Antoinette was popular and elicited strong engagement. The quality of responses varied, with work seen across the ability range. Effective responses demonstrated a nuanced understanding of Antoinette's character, linked to broader themes and symbolism, and incorporated critical perspectives and intertextual knowledge. Weaker responses tended to list points without forming a cohesive argument or fully exploring the implications of the question. Some answers lost focus by supporting both given views without forming a clear line of argument or reaching a conclusion. More effective responses shaped their exploration of both views into a cohesive argument. Many answers showed familiarity with post-colonial ideas and connected Brontë's *Jane Eyre* with Rhys's novel; those working in the middle of the mark range demonstrating the ability to link these points to Antoinette's situation. This intertextual approach enriched the analysis and understanding of her character and made for a purposeful use of literary context. Some candidates working at the top of the mark range noted that Antoinette's use of fire and her role as the frame narrator give her a degree of autonomy, although she remains a victim. These perceptive readings highlighted the complexity of her character.

(b) This question about the character of Rochester generated a range of responses, with stronger candidates excelling in detailed analysis and use of critical approaches while weaker candidates found value in the passage's shifting perspectives. Common themes included personal responses to Rochester's character and effective integration of material from throughout the novel, although some key elements were often overlooked. Personal responses to Rochester's character, particularly highlighting 'male toxicity', were common. Weaker candidates benefited from the fragmentary nature of the narrative form, which provided ample material to discuss, even if they struggled to construct a cohesive argument. Some responses deviated into post-colonial critiques without fully addressing the passage's specific content while others seemed to overlook the

'nameless boy' and the husband's attitude toward him. Stronger candidates analysed the rich language, fluctuating viewpoints, and references to other parts of the novel.

Question 12

NATASHA TRETHEWAY: *Native Guard*

(a) This was quite a popular question and candidates' responses to the focus on grief in Trethewey's poetry varied, with some impressive answers that effectively linked poems to context and explored themes in depth. Commonly chosen poems included *Monument* (guilt), *After Your Death* (guilt/long aftermath), *Genus Narcissus* (guilt), and *What the Body Can Say* (connectedness). Access to a limited number of poems was evident in the answers of less successful candidates, leading to a lack of detail and breadth. Some candidates struggled to find appropriate examples to use from the selection and presented general arguments with partial support. Stronger responses demonstrated detailed recall of the poems, allowing for well-supported comments on Trethewey's methods. The best answers offered strategic approaches, showed detailed knowledge and were able to integrate relevant biographical context and impressive, well-supported analysis.

(b) This question was also popular, and the full range of achievement was seen. Some candidates struggled with contextual knowledge and read the poem as a generic poem about refugees. Some candidates focused on the validity of the photograph and Trethewey's use of photographic techniques in the poem. Many candidates pointed out the significance of the subjects' gazes being fixed on the camera and the rifle, and the phrase 'waiting to disembark'. In the middle of the mark range, candidates with some contextual knowledge sometimes struggled to reference other poems with similar contexts from the selection. Excellent answers demonstrated wide-ranging contextual knowledge, close analysis and impressive understanding of the poem and others in the selection. The term 'ekphrasis' was used appropriately in the analysis of some well-informed responses. One exemplary answer examined the romanticisation of black experience by some liberal white people, particularly in relation to the blues and singing, using critics effectively.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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

Key messages

- **AO5 Evaluation of opinions** (O) is the ability to discuss and evaluate different opinions and interpretations of texts. It should be integrated into arguments relevant to the question.
- Contexts relate to knowledge and understanding and should be accurate and supportive of arguments.
- It is vital that candidates study **one** prose text and **one** poetry text. One of the texts studied must be written pre-1900 and one written post-1900.

General comments

First – and perhaps most importantly – a point about rubrics and rubric infringement that needs to be underlined specifically for A Level Literature in English. The rules for the two A Level papers are different. For Paper 3 Shakespeare and Drama, candidates can choose any play from Section A: Shakespeare and any play from Section B: Drama. For Paper 4 Pre- and Post-1900 Poetry and Prose, the rubric has an additional element. Candidates select one text from Section A and one from Section B, but one of those responses must be on poetry and one on prose. The penalty for failure to meet both requirements of the Paper 4 rubric is loss of all of the marks for the weaker of the two responses. For absolute clarity, teachers are reminded that the Chaucer text counts as poetry, not prose.

Examiners once again commended the enthusiasm and engagement shown by most candidates towards the texts studied. Personal exploration of ideas, themes, and concerns was often dynamic and thought-provoking, reflecting confidence in analysis and evaluation across all ability levels. This indicated that candidates gained meaningful insight and enjoyment from their reading and study of the novels and poems.

AO5 response is an important aspect of the mark scheme for this paper. Its use varied this series in terms of clarity, evidence and quality. This Assessment Objective requires candidates to consider the presence and influence of other interpretations, evaluating their validity and significance. However, **AO5** was sometimes forgotten or reduced to name-dropping of critics. The most effective references to other opinions and interpretations are smoothly incorporated within arguments. Merely name-dropping terms such as 'Post colonial' or 'Marxist' readings without informed discussion is inadequate. Some candidates reduced these views to basic statements without connecting them to a coherent argument. Candidates should use others' opinions to refine their own views. These can be linked to a personal opinion where a candidate weighs up the credibility or viability of each interpretation and argues a preference for one in particular. Referring to film versions of a novel is legitimate, as they represent a particular view or approach by the screenwriter or director. Comments made in class discussion can be referenced but it is important to ensure that these do not drift from the question or lack critical substance. Candidates should also consider what is practically possible in terms of critical views, for example, referring to Aristotle as a critic of *Wide Sargasso Sea* is obviously anachronistic and inaccurate. Another example wrote at length about how Whitman was influenced by E M Forster when Forster was only thirteen when Whitman died.

The application of knowledge and understanding of context varied significantly among candidates. Some provided incorrect comments that undermined their answers, while others included irrelevant biographical details about writers. Some candidates missed the opportunity to consider the influence of contexts on the works studied. References to context should be included to inform the reading of a text and may involve literary, social, historical, or cultural aspects. Candidates should use context to support relevant arguments linked to the question. An example would be references to the influences of Transcendentalism and Romanticism in relation to Whitman's style and methods or exploring the impact of the American Civil War on his views of conflict when writing about *Leaves of Grass*. Including isolated details like Whitman's dates of birth and death do not constitute contextual reference and are merely examples of background material.

In **(a)** questions it is essential that candidates read the question carefully to ensure the focus is established from the start. Examiners commented that a number of 'false starts' were seen where candidates had jumped into an answer to the **(a)** question without fully realising its demands. Planning is important to ensure a considered view is taken, with some good candidates this year using a thesis statement in their introduction to distil their arguments. Sometimes candidates start an answer but run out of steam as they have not planned a comprehensive way forward for their argument. This can lead to blandness, repetition or shallow, unsupported responses. Conversely, some candidates have too much to say and try to write down all they know. In the confines of an exam, this is not possible. Examiners saw a number of scripts this series that offered very long, but incomplete, essays or sprawling answers that lacked a clear thread of argument. Candidates should be urged to remember that 'select and use relevant knowledge' is a discriminator that runs throughout the mark scheme. Weaker answers to **(a)** questions often lacked specific analysis of detail or use of supporting quotations and references. The strongest presented strategic and focused responses with integrated support and coherent threads of argument.

The **(b)** questions require candidates to demonstrate an awareness of where the extract fits within the wider work. For poetry, this means contextualising the poem within the poet's broader work, referencing the collection and characteristic features. Candidates should be able to demonstrate why the passage or poem given is representative or unrepresentative of the rest of the text or collection/selection. The best responses start with detail, move outwards, and then come back to the passage as a pattern of approach throughout their answer. There was some evidence this session of answers treating poems as unseen texts, failing to meet the specification requirements. Candidates must consider poetry as a body of work of which individual poems are a part. Some candidates do not deal with the passage or poem in sufficient detail and sometimes focus more on other poems or parts of the prose text. The selection of a **(b)** question means that candidates must give the passage (or poem) and question provided their closest attention, with other parts of the text drawn in to support, contextualise and illustrate. Once again, it is important that candidates read the accompanying questions carefully as some of these have a thematic or character-based focus, while others reflect a broader approach to characteristic methods and effects of the writer.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Pre-1900 Poetry and Prose

Question 1

JANE AUSTEN: *Pride and Prejudice*

(a) Responses to this question on class and society in *Pride and Prejudice* varied widely in depth and quality but the option was popular and generally well-handled. Many candidates lacked a nuanced understanding of the class structure, often gravitating towards extremes in their interpretations. Weaker answers struggled to base their arguments in examples from the texts with some reliance on assertion. Better answers offered some interesting reflections on characters' adherence to class and status. For example, some explored characters such as Mr Collins, Lady Catherine and Bingley's sisters, who rigidly adhered to class structures, seeing them as undeveloped and static. These characters were compared to Elizabeth, Darcy and Bingley, who adopted a more fluid relationship with status and were noted for their growth and development. Useful discussions of context included Lady Catherine's attitude towards Elizabeth as a potential match for Darcy and the social status of the Bennet family. Several candidates with a nuanced understanding of the Regency period's class system produced exceptionally subtle and sophisticated answers.

(b) This question was also popular and candidates generally demonstrated a strong understanding of the relationship between Mr Bennet and Elizabeth, with higher achieving responses providing nuanced analysis of Austen's satire and narrative techniques. Insights into Mr Bennet's humour and the complexities of Elizabeth's relationships were common, though some responses could have benefited from a more critical view of Mr Bennet's behaviour. The bond between father and daughter was a common focus, with many candidates exploring this relationship in detail. Analysis of the passage was generally sound, with candidates linking the scene to earlier interactions between Mr Bennet and Elizabeth. Weaker answers tended to paraphrase the passage and lacked a critical view of the more subtle aspects of the extract. Some responses could have been strengthened by recognising the potential for more critical interpretations of Mr Bennet's behaviour as a father. Few responses noted the significance of Mr Bennet's line about the grief of seeing

Elizabeth unable to respect her partner in life. Some moderately successful responses offered interesting insights into Mr. Bennet's humour and his complexities as a character. Better answers showed a strong knowledge of the novel, offering insights into the complexities of marriage and Mr Bennet's concerns for Elizabeth. These strong responses also examined Austen's use of satire within the framework of the romance novel and her use of indirect discourse. One particularly good response that was seen explored how Mr Bennet is used to create humour earlier in the novel but is later used to critique values, showing him as entrenched in patriarchal ideology.

Question 2

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

(a) Most candidates' responses to this question on the presentation of May and her entrapment by gender roles and expectations were focused and insightful, albeit few in number. Stronger responses provided comparative analysis of detail and contextual understanding while weaker answers tended to provide character studies with little analysis or reference to personal interpretations. Some answers focused on how Chaucer's view of women is exemplified in his presentation of May. One effective answer covered key aspects of May's character and the societal roles imposed on women, providing a well-rounded analysis.

(b) There were few answers to this question. Responses identified the significance of Placebo's name, though some only thought of the medicinal use as something that looks real but conveys no benefit, rather than the Latin meaning of 'I shall please'. Some responded to the passage in isolation and did not draw the obvious comparison with Justinus. Some unpicked the irony and hypocrisy in Placebo's words and the biblical allusion to Solomon who was outwitted by a woman and had several wives. Better answers provided rigorous, contextually well-illustrated explorations with strong use of critical views.

Question 3

JOHN DONNE: Selected Poems

(a) This question was popular, and most candidates demonstrated a wide knowledge of Donne's poems and the different forms of relationships depicted in his works. Candidates tended to select appropriate poems and discussed Donne's relationships with women and with God. In most answers, analysis included connections to Donne's personal life and the broader cultural and religious context of his time. Weaker candidates were able to discuss different aspects of relationships, providing some strong personal responses. Stronger candidates made good contextual links, discussing Donne's own relationships and the specific context of the Renaissance period. Some candidates made interesting connections between the love poems and the religious meditations, showing overlaps between the secular and the divine. Others argued for a clear divide between the satirical, eroticised love poetry and the later, more solemn religious poetry. One particularly confident response examined three different forms of love, connecting Donne's work to the Renaissance context with critical selection and scholarly interpretation.

(b) This question on *A Nocturnal upon S. Lucy's Day* was more popular than the **(a)** question, and candidates generally dealt well with the poem's meaning. A range of achievement was seen with some candidates showing thorough and perceptive exploration while others struggled with the conceptual demands of the question. Few candidates reached Levels 5 and 6 due to a lack of wider reference and contextual connections. Most answers featured sound discussion of the imagery used in the poem with better candidates considering how literary techniques characteristic of Donne's work are used here and elsewhere in the selection. Cross-references to other poems were often apt and substantial, with some candidates linking to *A Valediction: forbidding Mourning*. Use of critics, especially T S Eliot, was noted in some responses, enhancing analysis. Few candidates addressed the contrast in the final stanza, which exhorts other lovers to 'enjoy your summer all'.

Question 4

THOMAS HARDY: *Far from the Madding Crowd*

(a) Several answers to this question on Gabriel Oak were seen. Most provided well-prepared and insightful responses. Strong answers discussed Oak's role as the antithesis to other suitors, his

representation as Hardy's ideal man and his connection to the pre-industrial world. These answers were supported by detailed textual references and demonstrated a strong grasp of the novel's themes and characters. Those responses exploring the idea that Gabriel represents Hardy's ideal man highlighted his unwavering support for Bathsheba and his stoic acceptance of his fate, and considered significant events like him losing his sheep, the Valentine's prank and Bathsheba's marriage to Troy. Some discussed the significance of Gabriel's name, drawing connections to his role as a shepherd and a guiding figure. Others focused on his work and affinity for the land, highlighting his connection to an unmechanised, rural way of life and Hardy's concerns for its passing. Very few weak answers were seen but these tended to be narrative in focus with some attempts to engage personally in sympathy with Gabriel.

(b) This question was slightly more popular than the **(a)** option but did not attract a large number of answers. Candidates provided some competent responses contrasting Bathsheba and Fanny but overall struggled with the duality of the passage and the shifts in readers' sympathies. There was a general lack of detailed analysis on the language and presentation of Bathsheba's emotional state. Methodical but superficial commentaries dominated weaker responses, indicating a need for deeper engagement with the text to produce more insightful answers. Few responses addressed how Bathsheba's world narrows towards emotional desperation and imprisonment. There was also little analysis of language and the ways in which Bathsheba's world is presented. Fewer very good answers were seen to this question than the **(a)** option but those who did succeed in reaching the higher levels were able to relate close focus on details of the passage to Hardy's wider concerns. For example, one candidate took a conceptual and critical view of Hardy's style, highlighting the struggle he faced in writing a powerful female lead and suggesting that Bathsheba still ends up being stereotyped, despite Hardy's efforts.

Question 5

BRAM STOKER: *Dracula*

(a) This question was quite popular with candidates. Most found the question on Lucy's portrayal accessible, and a range of achievement was seen. Candidates discussed Lucy's sexual attractiveness and transgressive nature, often contrasting her with Mina. Feminist approaches were common and well-handled, though some responses included harsh moral judgments. The overall quality varied, with some candidates offering nuanced analysis while others presented more straightforward explorations. One notable response included a comparison of Lucy to a character from Star Wars, indicating a unique but perhaps less relevant approach. Many responses focused on Lucy's sexual attractiveness. Stronger answers were able to discuss this aspect in relation to contemporary expectations of female behaviour, noting how Lucy's appeal and flirtatious nature were viewed in Victorian society. Weaker answers tended to describe Lucy with some reference to episodes, but detail was usually lacking.

(b) Responses varied in quality, with some candidates offering competent analysis focused on the passage and exploring Renfield's character in depth. The passage distinguished between candidates who knew the novel well and those with a shaky grasp. Gothic elements and cultural fears were highlighted by a few, while those with a better grasp of the novel effectively discussed Renfield as a sympathetic victim and a demonstration of Dracula's power. Some effectively discussed how Renfield's actions and behaviour highlight Dracula's dominance and the theme of lost autonomy. However, the question was less popular overall than the **(a)** option, and a number of candidates struggled to maintain a comprehensive discussion. The least successful answers quickly moved away from the passage and provided broad narrative commentary instead of detailed analysis.

Question 6

WALT WHITMAN: Selected poems from *Leaves of Grass*

(a) This question attracted very few responses. Those who answered it generally concentrated on Whitman's appreciation of the natural world, frequently referencing *Leaves of Grass*. While most responses were good and covered a variety of themes including physical and spiritual love, homoeroticism, and patriotism, one particularly perceptive response stood out for its comprehensive exploration of the question, addressing both the spiritual and sensual aspects of Whitman's poetry along with the theme of comradeship.

(b) This was a very popular question. Most candidates demonstrated an understanding of the poem though some responses mainly consisted of paraphrasing. Some candidates found the text challenging, possibly due to its brevity. Weaker answers tended to be repetitive, and broad-based, lacking focused language analysis. These candidates made unconvincing connections to other poems and seemed to struggle with Whitman's methods and concerns. In better answers there was a good deal of useful discussion about Whitman's representation of ordinary Americans and the collective nature of America which often included links to Whitman's broader ideas and other poems in the selection. Confident responses included consideration of the poem's context and what it represented at the time. Some very good answers explored the vernacular, synecdoche, and even a Taoist perspective, presenting complex arguments with clarity and perception. Other confident responses examined the power of song, representation of everyman, and inclusion of women, along with thoughts on language, such as the use of 'carols' and religious connotations.

Section B: Post-1900 Poetry and Prose

Question 7

SUJATA BHATT: Selected poems from *Point No Point*

(a) There were very few answers to this question. Those who chose this option were well-prepared and showcased an in-depth understanding of Bhatt's poetry, particularly in terms of cultural influences. These responses were marked by confidence and thorough knowledge of the selection with an insightful awareness of critical interpretations.

(b) This question on an extract from *The Stare* was very popular and generally well-handled. The majority of candidates demonstrated a good understanding of language use and critical perspectives, with stronger responses offering deeper philosophical insights and nuanced interpretations of the text. Most candidates explored the similarities and shared experiences between the child and the monkey. The ending of the poem and its implications on the concept of 'the word' were frequently discussed. Weaker responses, while often including personal reflections, lacked textual support and clarity. Some of these answers were partial and straightforward, with some thoughts on whether the monkey was in captivity. Attempts to use complex vocabulary sometimes resulted in a loss of clarity and fluency as ideas did not always flow logically. Stronger responses developed interesting ideas about different interpretations and varying views of the text for example, discussing the symbolism of the boy wanting 'bread…buttered and with honey', interpreting this as a loss of innocence and a potential future as a coloniser. These responses explored the philosophical ramifications of the split between man and animal and the role that language plays in that division. The best responses delved into the metaphysical implications of the division between man and animal, emphasising the role of language in this division.

Question 8

LOUISE GLŰCK: Selected poems from *The Wild Iris*

(a) There were insufficient responses to this question to write a meaningful report on candidates' performance.

(b) This question on *Trillium* was attempted by very few candidates, with most struggling to provide a cohesive and supported analysis. Responses were often tentative and disparate, suggesting unfamiliarity with the poem. Most responses provided a limited set of ideas and interpretations with a lack of reference to the wider selection. However, one perceptive response stood out for its deep examination of themes and form, highlighting Glück's struggle with grief and despair.

Question 9

JAMES JOYCE: *Dubliners*

(a) There were insufficient responses to this question to write a meaningful report on candidates' performance.

(b) Few answers were seen but those candidates who attempted the question tended to write strong answers. Answers tended to offer effective analysis of the content of the passage and demonstrated a strong understanding of authorial intent. There was successful use of critics to

support arguments which added depth to analysis and enhanced engagement with personal views. Examiners reported seeing sensitive ideas about imagery and context, specifically related to Irish nationalism. Analysis connected well with the broader treatment of women in Ireland during the period, showing further awareness of historical context.

Question 10:

TONI MORRISON: *Beloved*

(a) This was a popular question and many candidates showed personal engagement with Sethe's character, including her reactions to her infanticide. Discussions often included Sethe's role as a mother, her treatment by Schoolteacher and her relationships with Beloved and Paul D. Candidates were generally well-prepared, though some supported their answers with references to episodes rather than analysing narrative methods of form, structure and language. Weaker responses were primarily narrative-based, with limited understanding of the writer's methods, some struggling even to identify who Sethe is in the novel. Better answers showed sensitive handling of the challenging material in the novel, revealing impressive understanding of Morrison's narrative techniques and intentions. The best responses demonstrated knowledge of how Morrison's fragmentary narrative and stream of consciousness reflect Sethe's broken and wounded psyche.

(b) This question was also quite popular. Overall, responses were strong, reflecting an effective grasp of the novel's themes and techniques, despite some challenges in providing detailed analysis. The passage encouraged a range of responses, with even weaker candidates finding ways to engage with the effects and concerns of the text. Ideas about stream of consciousness were occasionally noted, though examples were often not provided to support these observations. Weaker candidates struggled to contextualise the passage within the broader narrative of the novel. These answers tended to drift towards narrative and there was evidence of some repetition. The best answers utilised wide-ranging references and material from the passage to demonstrate extensive knowledge of the novel.

Question 11:

JEAN RHYS: *Wide Sargasso Sea*

(a) There were several responses to this question, but it was less popular than the **(b)** option on the text. Although few in number, these responses were generally well-supported and well-structured, presenting clear arguments. Weaker answers displayed a limited understanding of the text, struggling particularly with the concept of betrayal and Rochester's realisation of Antoinette's madness, which had been hidden from him. Some candidates noted that Antoinette's confinement in a 'closet' was justified. The main argument was that Antoinette was a victim, with her husband being part of the problem. The best responses, however, presented a balanced view, portraying Rochester as a victim as well. These responses demonstrated a more probing and nuanced approach to the text, drawing in some interesting points of context and resulting in insightful analysis. One or two answers mainly attacked the notion implied in the question that Rochester might have some cause for sympathy. This prevailing argument was, nevertheless, usually argued coherently and convincingly.

(b) This was a very popular question. Most responses seen were impressive, noting the use of symbolism and cultural identity in the text with sympathetic personal engagement and understanding of post-colonial ideas. Many responses were extensively supported with references to Homi Bhabha but some applied his theories with blunt commentary. A notable trend was the frequent and thorough reference to *Jane Eyre* with some candidates constructing a significant part of their essays on comparative studies between the texts, showcasing some interesting intertextual development. Critical views focusing on the character of Antoinette were used effectively in many responses. Moderately successful candidates demonstrated a secure understanding and some incorporated feminist theory, discussing the depiction of women in Victorian times as either 'goddesses' or 'witches'. This idea was often well linked to Bertha's reliance on Christophine and magic, as well as Rochester's renaming of her as Bertha, which symbolically stripped her of her identity and culture—an important concern of Jean Rhys. The best responses demonstrated assured knowledge of the wider novel and made perceptive connections. These answers demonstrated a deep understanding of the themes and characters, providing insightful analysis.

Question 12:

NATASHA TRETHEWAY: *Native Guard*

(a) There were insufficient responses to this question to write a meaningful report on candidates' performance.

(b) This question on the poem *Monument* attracted several answers, most of them strong and relevant. Biographical context was largely well understood and used judiciously, with apt links to other poems and enhancement of arguments. Some particularly confident responses examined the specific context of the poem in view of Trethewey's mother's death and demonstrated an understanding of her point of view with effective levels of personal engagement. The best answers used links to other poems creatively, for example, one answer commented on the 'blister' in *Monument*, connecting it to the 'bruised fruit' in *After Your Death*, and explored the significance of ants. The ants' industry was contrasted with the speaker's state but also considered as a metaphor for how time eventually heals. Weaker answers struggled to understand the deeper meaning of the poem and offered partially secure responses with scant reference to the wider work.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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

Key messages

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General comments

First – and perhaps most importantly – a point about rubrics and rubric infringement that needs to be underlined specifically for A Level Literature in English. The rules for the two A Level papers are different. For Paper 3 Shakespeare and Drama, candidates can choose any play from Section A: Shakespeare and any play from Section B: Drama. For Paper 4 Pre- and Post-1900 Poetry and Prose, the rubric has an additional element. Candidates select one text from Section A and one from Section B, but one of those responses must be on poetry and one on prose. The penalty for failure to meet both requirements of the Paper 4 rubric is loss of all of the marks for the weaker of the two responses. For absolute clarity, teachers are reminded that the Chaucer text counts as poetry, not prose.

It is important to note that this version of the paper has a small entry at this time of year and comments on questions reflect a small number of scripts seen. Examiners once again commended the enthusiasm and engagement shown by most candidates towards the texts studied. Personal exploration of ideas, themes, and concerns was often dynamic and thought-provoking, reflecting confidence in analysis and evaluation across all ability levels. This indicated that candidates gained meaningful insight and enjoyment from their reading and study of the novels and poems.

AO5 response is an important aspect of the mark scheme for this paper. Its use varied this series in terms of clarity, evidence and quality. This Assessment Objective requires candidates to consider the presence and influence of other interpretations, evaluating their validity and significance. However, **AO5** was sometimes forgotten or reduced to name-dropping of critics. The most effective references to other opinions and interpretations are smoothly incorporated within arguments. Merely name-dropping terms such as ‘Post colonial’ or ‘Marxist’ readings without informed discussion is inadequate. Some candidates reduced these views to basic statements without connecting them to a coherent argument. Candidates should use others’ opinions to refine their own views. These can be linked to a personal opinion where a candidate weighs up the credibility or viability of each interpretation and argues a preference for one in particular. Referring to film versions of a novel is legitimate, as they represent a particular view or approach by the screenwriter or director. Comments made in class discussion can be referenced but it is important to ensure that these do not drift from the question or lack critical substance. Candidates should also consider what is practically possible in terms of critical views, for example, referring to Aristotle as a critic of *Wide Sargasso Sea* is obviously anachronistic and inaccurate. Another example wrote at length about how Whitman was influenced by E M Forster when Forster was only thirteen when Whitman died.

The application of knowledge and understanding of context varied significantly among candidates. Some provided incorrect comments that undermined their answers, while others included irrelevant biographical details about writers. Some candidates missed the opportunity to consider the influence of contexts on the works studied. References to context should be included to inform the reading of a text and may involve literary, social, historical, or cultural aspects. Candidates should use context to support relevant arguments linked to the question. An example would be references to the influences of Transcendentalism and Romanticism in relation to Whitman’s style and methods or exploring the impact of the American Civil War on

his views of conflict when writing about *Leaves of Grass*. Including isolated details like Whitman's dates of birth and death do not constitute contextual reference and are merely examples of background material.

In **(a)** questions it is essential that candidates read the question carefully to ensure the focus is established from the start. Examiners commented that a number of 'false starts' were seen where candidates had jumped into an answer to the **(a)** question without fully realising its demands. Planning is important to ensure a considered view is taken, with some good candidates this year using a thesis statement in their introduction to distil their arguments. Sometimes candidates start an answer but run out of steam as they have not planned a comprehensive way forward for their argument. This can lead to blandness, repetition or shallow, unsupported responses. Conversely, some candidates have too much to say and try to write down all they know. In the confines of an exam, this is not possible. Examiners saw a number of scripts this series that offered very long, but incomplete, essays or sprawling answers that lacked a clear thread of argument. Candidates should be urged to remember that 'select and use relevant knowledge' is a discriminator that runs throughout the mark scheme. Weaker answers to **(a)** questions often lacked specific analysis of detail or use of supporting quotations and references. The strongest presented strategic and focused responses with integrated support and coherent threads of argument.

The **(b)** questions require candidates to demonstrate an awareness of where the extract fits within the wider work. For poetry, this means contextualising the poem within the poet's broader work, referencing the collection and characteristic features. Candidates should be able to demonstrate why the passage or poem given is representative or unrepresentative of the rest of the text or collection/selection. The best responses start with detail, move outwards, and then come back to the passage as a pattern of approach throughout their answer. There was some evidence this session of answers treating poems as unseen texts, failing to meet the specification requirements. Candidates must consider poetry as a body of work of which individual poems are a part. Some candidates do not deal with the passage or poem in sufficient detail and sometimes focus more on other poems or parts of the prose text. The selection of a **(b)** question means that candidates must give the passage (or poem) and question provided their closest attention, with other parts of the text drawn in to support, contextualise and illustrate. Once again, it is important that candidates read the accompanying questions carefully as some of these have a thematic or character-based focus, while others reflect a broader approach to characteristic methods and effects of the writer.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Pre-1900 Poetry and Prose

Question 1

JANE AUSTEN: *Pride and Prejudice*

(a) Very few answers were seen to this question on relationships between sisters in the novel. Weaker answers offered largely unsupported commentaries on different combinations of characters with some attempts to engage personally. Elizabeth and Jane typically featured, with candidates recognising the closeness of this relationship and some better answers developing an argument based on their contrasting relationships (or lack of them) with Lydia. The best answers offered critically assured discussions of relationships and included references to Mary and Kitty as well as the others, considering how they fitted into the Bennet family dynamic. Links to context were effective in answers working at Levels 5 and 6 with consideration of the roles of women and the influence of entailment on their fates.

(b) There were very few answers to this question and most were weaker responses offering paraphrased approaches to the passage and question. Typically, there was very little selection of detail for analysis and a lack of critical exploration. Some more secure answers considered Austen's use of dialogue in the passage and referred to the significance of the passage in the context of the wider novel. The best answers formed an overview of the tone and significance of the passage, ranging through the answer to select points that supported their arguments.

Question 2

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

(a) There were very few answers to this question, however most were perceptive and recognised Chaucer's use of satire in the presentation of wives and different attitudes to them. Personal

opinions were thoughtful and supported with relevant quotation and reference. There were a few weaker responses that struggled to move beyond general discussion. Sometimes context was misused in these answers, for example one candidate stating that Chaucer was writing in Victorian times. Critical views were few in these answers with some candidates referencing critics who predated Chaucer and could not possibly have commented on his work. One notable example was the use of Aristotle. While it is fine to refer to Aristotelian theories, it is a step too far to suggest that he could have commented on Chaucer's work.

(b) There were very few answers to this question. Most answers seen were working at Level 2 and struggled to place the passage in the wider context of the tale. There were some very confused answers and general discussions of Januarie and May and the use of the garden. Others relied on paraphrase and broad contextual discussion of 'life in the Middle Ages'.

Question 3

JOHN DONNE: Selected Poems

(a) There were insufficient answers to this question to comment meaningfully on candidates' performance.

(b) There were a few answers to this question and these were mostly secure in terms of understanding *Divine Meditations 10* from the *Holy Sonnets*. Examiners saw some interesting connections made between poems devoted to love for women and those devoted to God. The best of these offered impressive reflections on how Donne's poetry always has spiritual concerns, even when focused on the earthly and physical nature of love. Sensitive personal response was sometimes combined with valid and relevant critical commentary.

Question 4

THOMAS HARDY: *Far from the Madding Crowd*

(a) There were insufficient answers to this question to comment meaningfully on candidates' performance.

(b) There were insufficient answers to this question to comment meaningfully on candidates' performance.

BRAM STOKER: *Dracula*

(a) *Dracula* was a popular text on this paper and the **(a)** option was the more popular of the two. This question on the dark side of human nature seemed to interest and engage candidates. A broad range of responses was seen relating to aspects such as duality, darkness and light, and ideas about Dracula's mercurial character. Discussions on the supernatural and folklore generated some interesting contextual points. The best answers used the quotation in the question to form confident thesis statements about the extent to which they agreed or did not agree. Van Helsing and Mina were cited as examples of Stoker's exploration of goodness with some developed discussions of the plurality of the 'crew of light' contrasted with Dracula's isolated situation as a 'lone wolf'. Weaker answers tended to agree fully that Stoker deals only with the dark side of human nature with some becoming bogged down trying to justify how this applies to characters such as Mina.

(b) This question was a little less popular than the **(a)** option. Better answers placed the passage clearly in context with some insightful references to Stoker's narrative choices, for example, 'Van Helsing conveys the moment as dire due to his formal register and urgency in recording'. They effectively placed emphasis on the importance of characters writing down and sharing experiences so that they can overcome Dracula. Most also noted the Gothic setting and weather conditions contributing to an effect of pathetic fallacy. Less successful answers working at Levels 2 and 3 missed the nuance of the passage and the weakest of these offered little more than paraphrase of the extract. One candidate wrote 'the tone is light and casual in describing the adventure', which is characteristic of the lack of specific analysis in the weakest answers.

Question 6

WALT WHITMAN: Selected poems from *Leaves of Grass*

(a) There were insufficient answers to this question to comment meaningfully on candidates' performance.

(b) This was a very popular question with a range of achievement seen. Most, but not all, responses were familiar with details of context and this reference allowed even the least able to make sense of the poem, *'O Captain! My Captain!'* Unless the candidate had no idea about Abraham Lincoln, they were able to form a coherent response. Some responses offered useful juxtapositions between joy and grief and the effects of this. The best responses followed a close analysis of the poem's language and form, but again, as with most of Whitman questions, candidates struggled to find convincing examples from the remainder of the selection. Some saw the poem as mourning not just Lincoln but all who had died in the conflict. Links to other poems included reference to *How Solemn as One by One*.

Section B: Post-1900 Poetry and Prose

Question 7

SUJATA BHATT: Selected poems from *Point No Point*

(a) There were several answers to this question on Bhatt's use of close observation in her poetry. Most reflected moderate performance and nearly all used the **(b)** poem, *Orpheus Confesses to Eurydice* in their answer. Candidates also chose *The Stinking Rose, Go to Ahmedabad* and *Angels' Wings.* Personal response was evident with some sensitivity of response, for example one candidate wrote, 'Bhatt sees beauty in the sight of mortality'.

(b) There were several answers to this question on *Orpheus Confesses to Eurydice*. Few considered the focus of the question on Bhatt's use of persona and offered generic analysis of the poem with only one or two candidates referring to other poems such as *The Stinking Rose*. Where the use of persona was considered, candidates engaged with the use of first person here and the nature of the address. There was little evidence of reference to context which was surprising as the poem is rich with opportunities for this discussion.

Question 8:

LOUISE GLŰCK: Selected poems from *The Wild Iris*

(a) There were insufficient answers to this question to comment meaningfully on candidates' performance.

(b) There were several answers to this question on *The Garden*. Candidates were able to focus on the theme of relationships and made a range of valid comments about the persona and their nature. One competent answer suggested, 'The narrator is likely older as the tone insinuates a type of wisdom and knowledge of the future'. Some explored ways in which the garden is used symbolically to convey life which is constantly changing as human relationships do. One answer explored the idea that the narrator sees a young couple falling in love but that their relationship is likely to end before it starts, much like the disappointment of not seeing fruit immediately after sowing seeds. Critical views were rarely evident in these responses but there were attempts to evaluate different interpretations and ideas. There were few examples of context beyond references to the Garden of Eden in Genesis.

Question 9:

JAMES JOYCE: *Dubliners*

(a) There were insufficient answers to this question to comment meaningfully on candidates' performance.

(b) There were very few answers to this question. Those seen tended to be secure, confident answers that were able to explore Joyce's use of characterisation in the extract from *After the Race* with insight and clarity. Selection of details was focused and supported arguments about how information relating to Jimmy's past is dovetailed into his present situation by Joyce. Points for analysis were well-selected and candidates used other stories such as *The Dead* and *Araby* in

consideration of the wider work. Unfortunately, some of these answers were in scripts that committed rubric infringements.

Question 10:

TONI MORRISON: *Beloved*

(a) There were very few answers to this question. Most were well done with candidates finding much to discuss on the theme of the supernatural. Weaker answers commented on episodes involving Beloved with a largely narrative focus. Better answers dealt well with Morrison's use of magic realism and considered how readers are led to suspend their disbelief through Morrison's narrative and in particular her use of stream of consciousness. Some interesting references were made to aspects of context with some answers considering links between the supernatural and religion.

(b) There were very few answers to this question. Most were weaker answers offering commentaries of the passage with better responses explaining how this episode represents a turning point in the novel and linking it to wider concerns. Some went too far with this approach and examiners reported seeing several general essays on the novel with brief mention of the given passage. Analysis tended to be patchy with some mention of the description of the weather and use of dialogue as a means of portraying character.

Question 11:

JEAN RHYS: *Wide Sargasso Sea*

(a) *Wide Sargasso Sea* was popular among candidates but the **(b)** option was more popular than **(a)**. Three particularly good essays stood out, which examined critical perspectives, the role of patriarchy, and the contextual background of the story. These essays demonstrated a deep understanding of the text and provided thorough and insightful commentary on the themes and characters. The predominant argument put forward was that Antoinette was a victim, and her husband contributed to her suffering. Some candidates, however, presented a more balanced view, portraying the husband as a victim as well. These balanced views often resulted in the best responses, as they required a more probing analysis of the text and developed personal arguments.

(b) This was a popular question eliciting a range of responses. Some candidates struggled to interpret the passage, primarily offering a critical view of Rochester. Stronger responses, however, delved into the unreliability of the narrative voice and the extent to which Rochester is unaware of his own prejudice and spite, which also simultaneously reveals his desperation and despair. These aspects were well addressed in the better essays. The best responses linked the passage closely to details from the wider text. One very effective essay highlighted the symbolic use of 'thirst' in the text. Antoinette describes herself as thirsty, a term also used to describe Rochester's sexual desire. In this context, it reflects Antoinette's longing to sedate herself to escape a reality that has become unbearable. Overall, candidates who successfully analysed the complexities of the narrative voice and the underlying themes in the text provided the most compelling and insightful essays.

Question 12:

NATASHA TRETHEWAY: *Native Guard*

(a) There were insufficient answers to this question to comment meaningfully on candidates' performance.

(b) There were very few answers to this question, and most were weak responses with some treating the poem as an unseen text. Bearing in mind the distinctive contextual background of Trethewey's work, it is very difficult to do this successfully and examiners saw a number of thin and general responses. Better answers considered the use of couplets to convey fragmentation of historical truth and interpretation and the use of media to distort the reality of slavery. One good answer commented on how Trethewey neatly expresses the pervasive and insidious nature of racism in the southern United States and how the poem critiques the selective memory and denial rooted in the teaching of Southern history.