

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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

Key messages

1. Learners should ensure they address the idea of ‘presentation’ in appropriate questions.
2. Learners should avoid ‘feature-spotting’ at the expense of analysis in their essays.

General comments

There were responses seen at every level of the mark scheme to every text on the paper. The large majority of learners showed evidence of appropriate preparation, with at least a sound basic knowledge of their two texts. Many learners had evidently worked hard to acquire their knowledge and understanding of the texts and these learners were always able to select relevant material to address the given tasks. There were few rubric errors in this session, but it is important that learners understand the optionality on the paper if they are to achieve the best mark possible. The quality of the expression was generally appropriate to the task, with some excellent examples of essay writing seen. Some learners, on the other hand, are at times disadvantaged by a lack of clarity in their writing.

There are two specific issues to be addressed in this session:

1. Many of the questions on this paper refer to the writer’s ‘presentation’ of a specific element in the text or in the passage from the text. Learners should note this requires them to consider the writer’s choices, which may include genre-specific methods such as stage directions, or more general matters of style such as choices of imagery and language. Many less successful answers would be improved by ensuring that these points are considered fully, along with providing evidence of knowledge and understanding of the text.
2. There were a number of learners in this session who used a list of literary terms as a way of structuring their response, particularly on **(b)** questions on poetry. This can be a useful way of approaching the text, but learners should also remember that these terms are not in and of themselves ‘analysis’ of the text. There were many occasions when a term such as ‘asyndeton’ or ‘metonymy’ was followed by an example from the text without any other comment, so that it seemed the learner was ‘feature-spotting’ rather than analysing the effects of the writer’s choices. Learners should always have the effects of the writing, especially in passage questions, as the main focus of their essay.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Drama

Question 1

ARTHUR MILLER: *All My Sons*

- (a) This was a popular choice with almost one third of the entry offering a response. Nearly every answer was able to select relevant material with which to address the task, most often focusing on some of the relationships in the Keller family and in the Deever family. Weaker answers tended to summarise the relationships, most often that between Chris and his father and George and his father, with slightly better ones at this level offering comparisons between them, showing how ‘Chris and George learn the truth about their fathers and it changes everything for them’, as one suggested. Other weaker answers retold the stories of all of the relationships in turn, though rarely moving beyond simple narrative. More competent answers considered in what ways these

relationships developed during the course of the play and often noted that ‘as revelations occur, so does the plot become more complex and involved, until Chris’s rejection of his father leads to the tragic climax of the play’, as one learner explained. Many sound answers explored the way ‘these relationships are all intertwined’, with some able to tease out the ‘paradoxes, such as Anne knowing the truth about Larry, but rejecting her own father anyway’, as one put it. Good answers moved beyond these complex narratives and considered how Miller presents the relationships dramatically. Many good answers noted the comparisons and contrasts between the families and the separate relationships in detail. Others explored the use of stage directions, often with appropriate quotation, while other good answers analysed the language, comparing for example ‘Joe’s nervous, almost shifty, words, to Chris’s straight to the point language’. Some learners also noted the use of symbols, such as the tree and the letter, exploring what effect these might have on an audience. Very good answers were able to bring such approaches together within a structured framework, fully alive to the dramatic methods that Miller uses, and often showing a perceptive awareness of contexts.

- (b) This was the most popular question in **Section A**. Some weak answers were not confident about the nature of the relationships and the characters’ roles, particularly George and Larry, both of whom were mistakenly identified as Anne’s father and husband. Learners do need to show accurate knowledge of the basics of their texts across all the levels of assessment. Other limited responses narrated the events leading up to George’s arrival, sometimes in great detail, with a consequent lack of focus on the given passage. Many responses did show at least partial awareness of Anne and Chris’s situation, with better responses at this level aware of the underlying tensions between them, George and the rest of the family. More competent answers were able to explore some of Miller’s dramatic methods, his use of stage directions and the contrasting tones for example, in discussing George’s significance at this point in the play. Many noted his ‘rudeness to Sue and Chris as he adjusts to being back near his old home’, as one put it. Others considered the tensions in more detail, ‘George fresh from realising his father is innocent, Chris worried that his marriage to Anne might be in jeopardy and Anne torn between her loyalty to George and her love for Chris’, as one summarised them. Good answers probed more deeply into the complexities of the situation. ‘The shadow of Larry’s death and Steve’s wrongful imprisonment hangs over every word’, as one suggested, whilst other answers considered the impact of George’s arrival on the play’s development and how ‘his attitudes and words start the doubts in Chris’s mind about his own father’, as one learner put it. Very good answers developed such ideas, with some seeing George more symbolically as ‘the avenger come to defend his father’. Other very good answers compared and contrasted Miller’s presentation of George and his relationship with Anne, to that of Chris and, in some cases, Joe. Such arguments were at times well supported by detailed reference to the passage and the wider text. Very good answers also analysed the details of the passage fully, exploring language and tone, as well as the stage directions and the dramatic action, often with perceptive comments well supported by precise reference to the passage.

Question 2

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Much Ado About Nothing*

- (a) This was a minority choice of question. Nearly every answer had some relevant details from Shakespeare’s presentation of Benedick. Weaker answers tended to retell his relationship with Beatrice, often in great detail, with more capable answers also referring to his friendship with Claudio and Don Pedro and how ‘by the end he has to choose between love and friendship after Hero’s false accusation’, as one answer stated. Competent answers were able to shape their discussions to the given question, exploring for example ‘the many different ways Benedick is suffering, physically, emotionally and socially because of his newfound love for Beatrice’, as one noted. Good answers developed such ideas, considering in detail Shakespeare’s presentation, ‘through the use of deception, the quick-witted comic exchanges and Benedick’s soliloquys’, which ‘led to a rounded and interesting characterisation’, as one put it. Other good answers focused on the quotation directly, considering the significance of his ‘use of “suffer” and “against my will” as indicating the conflict between the public, antagonistic image and the tender more caring reality’, as one suggested. Other essays explored this conflict, noting how ‘he is the one who first suggests Don John is the real villain and quickly sides with Beatrice and thus Hero against Claudio,’ as one put it. Very good answers analysed Shakespeare’s use of language, ‘the innuendoes in many of Beatrice’s quips’, and ‘the vagueness of the backstory’ all of which ‘develop the audience’s interest in his character and his relationship’, as one suggested. Very good answers supported such discussions with apposite contextual references and precise references to and quotation from the text.

- (b) This was the more popular choice for this text. Nearly every answer could identify the context and were aware of some of the significance of this passage. Weak answers retold the history of Borachio's deception and the consequences for Hero, though some assumed she was now really dead and that there was a 'niece' to take her place in the remarriage. Better answers at this level often had strong opinions on 'the unfairness of the situation, as men decide what will happen to the women', as one put it, with some strong condemnation of Claudio and Leonato in a number of answers, for 'At least Borachio did what he did for money and appears genuinely repentant for the effects of his actions as well as defending Margaret', as one essay suggested. More competent answers developed these points, with some awareness of the question – how an audience might be affected. Many saw that some would be offended by the situation, how Claudio is so easily forgiven, whereas others, recognising the context, suggested that 'the easiness with which Claudio accepts the second marriage would not trouble an Elizabethan audience, comfortable with the comic conventions', as one put it. Good answers explored the tone, how Shakespeare shifts between near tragedy to easy comedy, as well as looking closely at the language, with some analysing the poison imagery. Claudio's assertion that he sinned 'but in mistaking' was often commented on at this level, with some linking his words to the play's title and its inherent word play. Very good answers were able to shape their arguments to the task seamlessly, exploring many pertinent concerns, with appropriate support and contextual awareness. Some very good answers also noted the comic elements in this passage, Dogberry in particular, and some recognised how the audience would approve of 'Leonato's undoubted enjoyment in being able to berate the princes, safe in the knowledge that Hero is still alive'.

Question 3

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

This was not a popular choice of text, with too few responses on the (a) option to make general comments.

- (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 seen on this question. Weaker answers often had some knowledge of Amope's role in the play generally, but rarely were able to focus on the details of the passage. Better answers at this level had some understanding of her character, 'typically angry and abusive to everyone around', as one noted. Other answers discussed her role here in terms of the plot, through her relationship with Jero and her husband Chume, but also in terms of 'Soyinka's moral concerns about life in Nigeria', as one suggested. She was often seen as 'a moral compass, helping the audience recognise the corruption all round', as one said, though other competent responses saw her as 'the caricature of the angry, bitter wife, inevitably going to get her come-uppance,' as one expressed it. Good answers considered Soyinka's presentation in more detail. For example, 'her aggressive language, her talking to the audience and her frustration at Jero's escape all make her more human', as one essay argued. Other noted the use of stage directions, as well as the comic element, 'almost slap stick and physical', as one put it. Where such ideas were supported by apposite quotation from the text and some focused analysis, the answers did well.

Question 4

THOMAS MIDDLETON AND WILLIAM ROWLEY: *The Changeling*

This was the least popular text on the paper with almost no responses seen on either option. Consequently, it is not possible to make general comments about performance.

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

Section B: Poetry

Question 5

ROBERT BROWNING: Selected Poems

This was a minority choice of text in **Section B** with too few responses on option **(a)** to be able to make general comments.

- (a)** There were too few responses to this question to be able to make a general comment on performance.
- (b)** There were not many responses to this question overall. Weaker answers seemed to struggle with some basic knowledge of the poem, appearing to respond as to an 'unseen', with a consequent loss of understanding and a too generalised personal response. Better answers at this level tended to summarise the content of the poem, with some awareness of the wider text and some understanding of Browning's concerns, most commonly time passing, change, nature and lost glory. More competent answers considered Browning's poetic methods, for example, 'his use of the grand lexis of courts and palaces juxtaposed with the ordinary sights of the countryside, sheep grazing where once there was a hundred gated city,' as one suggested. Language and imagery were analysed at this level, with some understanding of Browning's methods and his concerns, though good answers also considered his use of form and rhythm, to 'create a mood of peaceful nostalgia, reflecting his attraction to natural things,' as one put it. Other good answers did integrate some contextual references and where the analysis was supported by precise reference to the extract and the wider text, the answers did well.

Question 6

OWEN SHEERS: *Skirrid Hill*

This was a minority choice of text in **Section B** with too few responses on option **(a)** to be able to make general comments

- (a)** There were too few responses to this question to be able to make a general comment on performance.
- (b)** This was a relatively popular choice, with nearly every answer showing some knowledge of the poem, though some very weak answers did appear to be approaching the poem as an 'unseen', limiting the depth of their response. Limited answers were able to offer a paraphrase of the poem, with some personal response, often criticising the subject of the poem for his corruption and chauvinism. Better answers at this level showed some understanding of the poet's concerns, some noting that 'this is unusual in being an overtly political poem,' while for others 'the absence of references to Wales is remarkable,' as one put it. Better answers explored Sheers's characterisation, his choices of language and imagery and often linked this to 'other dominating men in his poetry like the blacksmith and the fishmonger', as one noted. Good answers developed the analysis across a range of poetic methods, analysing the effects of the descriptors, as well as considering poetic form and his use of half rhymes and enjambement. Where appropriate contexts were integrated into the argument, with apposite reference to the poem, the answers often did well.

Question 7

Songs of Ourselves, Volume 2

This was the most popular **Section B** text, with a more or less even split between the two options.

- (a)** Most learners were able to select two relevant poems with which to address the task. Very weak answers seemed to be constrained to use poems that they could remember however removed from religious content or the Sassoon poem set for the **(b)** question. Such choices unfortunately severely limited the effectiveness of the responses. It is important that learners have sufficient knowledge and understanding of the text to be able to make relevant and informed choices in addressing questions, particularly **(a)** option essays. More successful answers at this level offered summaries of their selected poems, evidencing at least partial knowledge and basic understanding. Where contrasting poems were chosen, the learners at least implicitly explored contrasts and

comparisons in the poets' concerns. More competent answers considered the 'ways in which' directly, often contrasting the language and imagery used. Some considered different poetic forms and the use of rhyme and rhythm as well. Where such points were supported by apposite quotation, the answers often became confident, especially where appropriate contextual references were integrated into the discussion. Very good answers often had a clear structured argument, sometimes directly contrasting the attitudes shown in their selected poems. This led some learners into perceptive analysis of the effects of different choices, often with detailed support and insightful commentary.

- (b) This was the most popular question in **Section B** with one third of the entry choosing it. Most answers revealed at least a basic knowledge of the poem and some understanding of Sassoon's concerns and the contexts within which he was writing. Very weak answers, however, often appeared confused by the situation in the poem and their essays suggested that this was not a poem they had been studying previously. Better answers at this level did understand the situation and were able to paraphrase the poem with some awareness of its significance and at times of 'Sassoon's anti-war stance and his anger at the waste of young lives', as one put it. At this level personal comment was sometimes directed at war generally or the perceived 'unfairness of sending people off to die far from home', as one put it. However, without some clear links to details in the given poem these were often generalised and restricted in quality. More competent answers did look closely at Sassoon's methods, especially his use of language and imagery, noting the 'contrasting use of nature to emphasise the tragic circumstances', as one learner suggested. Others noted the use of 'contrasting language of violence and kindness, to suggest to the reader the emotions of both soldier and medical staff', as one essay stated. Good answers focused on the nuances of narrative here, how 'the poet provides different views of the soldier, from the blind, agonised victim, to the patient that needs care, to the selected choice of Death', as one candidate said, with many answers at this level showing sensitive personal response and perceptive analysis of the poetic methods. Very good answers developed such analysis by considering how 'Sassoon use the verse form and the structure to build the reader's response to the soldier, so that his death in the end comes as a shock, but also a release', as one essay suggested. At this level there was often a sharp understanding of the effects of the poetic choices, as well as very good appreciation of relevant contexts.

Question 8

GILLIAN CLARKE: Selected Poems

This was a minority choice of text in **Section B** with too few responses on option (a) to be able to make general comments.

- (a) There were too few responses to this question to be able to make a general comment on performance.
- (b) This was very much a minority choice, with only a few essays seen. Weaker answers offered a paraphrase of some of the details of the poem, with some basic awareness of Clarke's concerns, usually the nature but also time passing and changes. There was some confusion over the meaning of the title at times, which restricted the relevance of some responses. More competent answers were able to explore the language and imagery with some understanding, noting how 'Clarke creates a world that is under attack by the coming winter', as one put it. Others noted her 'typical use of specific detail in the "leaf" and the "rose", showing her close observation of the world around her', as one essay expressed it. Good answers considered the effects of the imagery and the language in detail, often with some contextual awareness in support. There were, however, very few attempts to explore other key poetic methods, such as Clarke's choices of form and structure, which limited the overall depth of the analysis and therefore the success of the essay.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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

Key messages

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2. Learners should avoid ‘feature-spotting’ at the expense of analysis in their essays.

General comments

There were responses seen at every level of the mark scheme to every text on the paper. The large majority of learners showed evidence of appropriate preparation, with at least a sound basic knowledge of their two texts. Many learners had evidently worked hard to acquire their knowledge and understanding of the texts and these learners were always able to select relevant material to address the given tasks. There were few rubric errors in this session, but it is important that learners understand the optionality on the paper if they are to achieve the best mark possible. The quality of the expression was generally appropriate to the task, with some excellent examples of essay writing seen. Some learners, on the other hand, are at times disadvantaged by a lack of clarity in their writing.

There are two specific issues to be addressed in this session:

1. Many of the questions on this paper refer to the writer’s ‘presentation’ of a specific element in the text or in the passage from the text. Learners should note this requires them to consider the writer’s choices, which may include genre-specific methods such as stage directions, or more general matters of style such as choices of imagery and language. Many less successful answers would be improved by ensuring that these points are considered fully, along with providing evidence of knowledge and understanding of the text.
2. There were a number of learners in this session who used a list of literary terms as a way of structuring their response, particularly on **(b)** questions on poetry. This can be a useful way of approaching the text, but learners should also remember that these terms are not in and of themselves ‘analysis’ of the text. There were many occasions when a term such as ‘asyndeton’ or ‘metonymy’ was followed by an example from the text without any other comment, so that it seemed the learner was ‘feature-spotting’ rather than analysing the effects of the writer’s choices. Learners should always have the effects of the writing, especially in passage questions, as the main focus of their essay.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Drama

Question 1

ARTHUR MILLER: *All My Sons*

- (a) This question was a relatively popular choice. Most learners were able to select relevant material from the text with which to address the task. Some weaker answers did however focus on ‘women’s attitudes’ rather than ‘attitudes to women’, with a consequent loss of relevance and focus. Other weaker answers retold the narratives of particularly Kate Keller and Anne Deever, often in great detail, though not always able to consider the different attitudes to them. Better answers at this level were able to identify different aspects of their stories, for example the contrasting views of Chris, Joe and Anne to Kate’s belief in Larry’s survival. More competent answers developed such approaches into a structured survey of these contrasting attitudes. For

example, in terms of 'how the men see the role of a woman, such as Frank's belittling of Lydia', as well as the 'reactions of women as different as Anne and Sue to Jim's desire to do medical research', as one answer suggested. Good answers analysed how Miller uses the different attitudes to develop his characterisation, so that 'Kate, at first a sympathetic grieving mother, gradually turns into a manipulative and deceptive wife, as the truth of her part in the cover up is dramatically revealed', as one essay put it. Other good answers explored the role of Anne in detail, noting how 'Larry, Chris and George all see her as "theirs" and an ally, whereas Kate and Joe are afraid of her and what she represents', as one essay said. Very good answers supported such ideas by close reference to the text, analysing for example Miller's use of symbols and 'stage directions to reinforce his dramatic message'. Other very good answers explored the language used, the 'aggressive diction of Kate and Sue contrasting sharply with the gentler, softer words used by Chris and even Joe', for example. Where such ideas were supported by relevant contexts and an effective structure the answers did very well.

- (b) This was the most popular question in **Section A**, with responses seen at every assessment level. Nearly every learner had knowledge of Joe's role and characterisation in the play as a whole, with which to address the task. However more limited responses often seemed unsure about the context and at times were unable to link their ideas about Joe generally to the given passage. Weak answers tended to summarise Joe's narrative, often in detail. Better answers at this level were aware of some of the tensions in the passage and were able to explore the relationships and what they reveal about Joe. More competent answers made this the focus of the essay, noting, for example, how 'Anne's attitude to her supposedly guilty father leads to Joe's outburst about his son, foreshadowing the tragic ending of the play'. Other sound responses tracked Joe's comments, as 'he tentatively leads up to his offers about Steve and George, revealing his anxiety about how they might react when they see him again', as one suggested. Many sound answers explored how Miller presents his fears and his guilt in this passage, with some also noting his enduring love for his son, 'and that underneath he is still grieving for his lost son, Larry', as one said. Good answers developed such points with close reference to the text, noting Miller's use of stage directions, the change in 'tone from relaxed chatting to angry outbursts', and the contrasting language of Joe's 'forced casual flippancy about education to Anne and Chris's more serious responses', for example. Very good answers were alive to the subtext, Joe's fears and guilt, Anne's hiding of Larry's suicide note and Chris's intensity in his desire for Anne and marriage. Where such analysis was developed, with supporting contexts, as well as apposite reference to the wider text, the answers did very well.

Question 2

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Much Ado About Nothing*

- (a) This was a relatively popular question, with most learners agreeing with the quotation and finding relevant material with which to support their views. Weaker responses summarised the main relationship between Claudio and Hero, often finding this to be particularly shallow, with 'Claudio falling in and out of love without any real knowledge of her and Hero simply doing what her father told her', as one suggested. Nearly every answer was 'appalled that she could eventually accept him after the way he had treated her in the church', finding this to be 'strong evidence of just how shallow and superficial they both were', as one learner argued. Better answers at this level also dealt with Beatrice and Benedick's relationship, with some finding this to be 'more substantial as they at least knew each other well', though others thought them equally shallow in that 'they are simply tricked into a marriage that neither of them previously seemed to want', as one essay stated. More competent answers moved beyond the straightforward narratives, for example considering how Shakespeare 'contrasts the two couples in terms of the knowledge of each other and their ability to talk to each other'. Other sound answers compared the characterisations involved, how Benedick and Beatrice develop 'in stark contrast to the static shallowness of Hero and Claudio', as one suggested. Good answers widened the range of reference and the depth of their understanding, noting how Margaret and Borachio, for example, reflect 'the more typical male dominated relationship of the period'. Some answers remembered Don Pedro's proposal and its comic rejection by Beatrice, 'which perhaps Shakespeare saw as the reason Pedro wanted to make a mockery of her and Benedick in the deception scenes,' according to one candidate. Very good answers looked closely at the presentation of the couples, noting, for example, the comic undertones in much of their interaction and how this was used to 'emphasise the shock of Hero's shaming in the church. There was some insightful analysis of language, imagery and tone at this level, with apt quotations and integrated contextual support. Such essays did very well.

- (b) This was the less popular choice for *Much Ado About Nothing*. Weaker answers were at times confused by the context and what in fact it was that Dogberry and Verges were trying to report to Leonato. Better answers at this level were able to summarise the contextual narrative and show some understanding of how the comedy is created by 'Dogberry's misuse of words and Leonato's impatient, good humour', as one argued. As the essays became more competent so did the narrative context become a backdrop to the actual situation here, 'a comic trope of the bungling servant and the tolerant master', as one suggested. Other sound answers considered the language, particularly, in detail, with clear analysis of how the comedy worked. Better answers also considered other dramatic methods as well, the interactions between Dogberry and Verges and the possible staging to reveal Leonato's impatience, for example. Good answers were alive to the irony of the situation, 'with Leonato so close to foiling Don John's malicious plan to shame his daughter, but losing the chance much to the audience's likely horror', as one said. Other good answers explored how this 'comic form of justice was significant to Shakespeare's presentation of justice more generally', linking this scene to 'Don John's previous mischief making and his eventual capture and threatened punishment', as one argued. Very good answers developed the analysis with insight, often exploring the malapropisms, the comic interactions and Leonato's responses in great depth. Where such essays were supported by appropriate contexts and precise references to the text, they often did very well.

Question 3

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

This was not a popular choice of text, with a more or less even split between the two options.

- (a) This was the minority choice of question in this section. Nearly every answer appropriately focused on Jero himself. Weaker answers summarised the various 'tricks he uses to get his own way, whether to avoid paying his debts, to control followers like Chume or to baffle the politicians', as one summarised it. Better answers at this level did find some development in his deceptions across the two plays, as 'his power and therefore his ambition grows', as one said. Sound answers explored the way Soyinka 'uses the different types of deception to develop his themes', ranging from 'corruption in religion and politics to personal greed and the naivety of the followers like Rebecca', as one suggested. Other sound answers developed such ideas by reference to other characters such as the Ananias and Shadrach, seeing different types of deception and exploring how Soyinka used them to 'create comedy and tension in both plays', for example. Good answers explored the language in detail as well as some of the comic exchanges, showing good understanding of Soyinka's dramatic methods and often noting how he developed these across the two plays so that 'the tone of *Metamorphosis* is much darker than the previous play', as one stated. Where such arguments were supported by appropriate contexts and specific reference to the text the answers did well.
- (b) This was the slightly more popular question on this text. Weaker answers tended to retell Rebecca's story in great detail, but with at best intermittent reference to the given passage. Other weaker answers offered a summary of the events of the passage, often showing some basic understanding of the situation and the characters. Better answers were able to focus more on Rebecca and her role here 'in bamboozling the Executive, by her show on innocence and religious belief', as one suggested. Competent answers looked more closely at Soyinka's methods, noting for example 'the comedy in how Rebecca talks at cross purposes to the Executive', whilst other sound answers considered the dramatic action, analysing the stage directions and what these suggested about the staging of the play. Good answers noted how Rebecca develops in this passage, becoming 'a true mouthpiece for Jero's preaching, her language reflecting his closely', as one said, 'though her pursuit of the Executive as her "inspiration" grows is both comical and serious, as corrupt religion seeks to impose itself on corrupt politics', as one summarised it. Very good answers explored the religious language in detail, with some able to integrate telling contextual references effectively.

Question 4

THOMAS MIDDLETON AND WILLIAM ROWLEY: *The Changeling*

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

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

Section B: Poetry

Question 5

ROBERT BROWNING: Selected Poems

This was the least popular text in **Section B** with only a small minority of responses, evenly split across the two options.

- (a) Most learners were able to select relevant poems with which to address the task. Popular choices were *A Woman's Last Word*, *Confessions*, *Life in a Love*, *Love in a Life*, *Meeting at Night*, *Porphyria's Lover* and *My Last Duchess*. Weaker answers tended to paraphrase the chosen poems, often showing clear knowledge of the text and some understanding of Browning's concerns. Learners who chose contrasting poems were able to show awareness of Browning's methods in discussing the meaning of the poems. Better answers at this level used such contrasts as a way of structuring their essays. These became competent as responses focused at least partly on some of his poetic methods, most usually language and imagery, so that 'the soft imagery of the sea side and nature in *Meeting at Night* creates an image of a gentle loving relationship compared to the storms and violence of for example *Porphyria's Lover*', as one answer put it. Good answers considered a wider range of methods, noting for example the different uses of the first-person narrators and their contrasting effects. Other good answers analysed some of the imagery in great detail, showing the range of types of love that Browning presents, 'from tender romance of gentle firesides after storms to the sensuality of hair and its violent uses', according to one candidate. Very good answers developed such ideas, considering, for example, how 'the rhythms of the exhilarating *Last Ride Together* are contrasted to the more jagged and jerky rhythms of *The Lost Mistress*. Very good answers also supported arguments and analysis with close reference to the poems and a confident awareness of contexts.
- (b) Nearly every answer had some views on the Bishop to share and was able to develop a relevant response. Weaker answers tended to summarise the extract, though some were distracted into presenting their opinions on the hypocrisy of religion, with only brief and general reference to the poem. Better answers at this level did support their comments by some reference to the poem. More competent responses knew the poem well and could refer appropriately to the rest of the poem. Answers at this level also showed some understanding of Browning's concerns, could select relevant details to support their comments and were alive to the irony of some of the Bishop's words. Good answers developed the analysis, showing confident awareness of Browning's use of dramatic monologue, his use of rhythm and choice of verse form, for example. Other good answers considered the tone of the Bishop's words, exploring how Browning reveals his envy and jealousy of Gandolf for example and his avarice through his obsession with the lapis lazuli. Other very good responses noted some of the dramatic elements in the poem – 'the use of hidden dialogue, the reported actions and the Bishop's breaking off and lack of coherence at times all bring the scene to life for the reader', as one suggested. Where such arguments were supported by detailed reference to the passage and the text, with awareness of contexts, the responses often did very well.

Question 6

OWEN SHEERS: *Skirrid Hill*

This was a minority choice in this session with a slight majority opting for the passage question option (b).

- (a) There were only a few responses to this question. Popular poems for discussion were *Winter Swans*, *History*, *Skirrid Fawr*, *Liable to Floods* and *Mametz Wood*. Weaker answers summarised their chosen poems, often in detail, with better answers at this level distinguishing between the human and natural elements in the poems. Sounder answers showed understanding of some of Sheers's concerns – 'the grandeur of nature and the frailty of humans', as one suggested, as well as secure knowledge of the poems. Good answers always looked at some of the poetic methods, with Sheers's use of tercets a popular discussion point. Other answers noted his use of symbols,

imagery and language, often contrasting his choices across the two poems. Very good answers were able to explore some of the effects of these choices, with a clear focus on the human response to the natural world, and appropriate support from the poems. There was often in the best essays a perceptive grasp of Sheer's concerns as well as some insightful use of relevant contexts.

- (b) This was the slightly more popular choice on this question. Weaker answers often presented a general summary of the poem, with too little focus on the relationship. Other essays at this level roamed more widely in the text, often showing some knowledge, but with too little focus on the given poem. More competent answers had a sound understanding of the poem, with some appreciation of the wider text, linking to other similar poems such as *Landmark* and *Keyways*. Better answers at this level were aware of his 'usual concern with sexual relations, where there is always a sort of distant intimacy revealed', as one candidate said. Good answers explored some of the poetic methods in detail: for example, 'the body as a landscape, the dying lights reflecting the dying relationship and his use of the first person', as one suggested, 'all typical of his style'. Other good answers noted the imagery in more detail, as well as the verse form and the use of rhythm. Such points were developed in very good essays through analysis of the effects of the methods and how that 'informs the reader's view of the couple', though some saw 'a close relationship bonded by their physical intimacy', others thought 'the dying lights and the girl leaving him were signs of a dying relationship'. Some very good answers noted the effects of the speaker's voice, 'how as an observer of the relationship he makes it feel like a clip from a film, cold and unemotional, with both of them too aware of performing to be really close', as one summarised it. Where such arguments were supported by close reference to the poem and appropriate contexts the answers did very well.

Question 7

Songs of Ourselves, Volume 2

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

- (a) Nearly every response to this question was able to select relevant poems with which to address the task. Popular poems selected included *Song, When We Two Parted, Farewell, Ungrateful Traitor, Sonnet 19, The Pride of Lions, The Wedding, If Thou Must Love Me, A Song of Faith Forsworn, Waterfall* and *A Wife in London*. Weaker essays showed some knowledge of their chosen poems, with better answers at this level having a partial and straightforward understanding of the poems' meaning. More competent answers often made sound choices of contrasting poems, enabling some contrasts and comparisons in terms of content and at times poetic methods. Some learners at this level were able to support their points with relevant quotations. Good answers had a very secure knowledge and understanding of their chosen poems, often offering a well-balanced argument and giving equal weight to each poem. They also focused on 'presentation' often exploring poetic methods such as language and imagery with some insightful analysis. Very good answers developed this further, with perceptive analysis of the methods and their effects, with some able to compare the poems 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 the most popular question in **Section B** with over half of the entry offering a response. Weaker answers often had a general understanding of Jove and the Day of Judgement, though some were confused by some of the references such as 'armed with terrors' and 'you're bit', as though they were responding to an unseen poem. Better answers at this level did know the poem and were able to explore some of the meaning and some of Swift's concerns, though answers that remembered that it is his 'vision' did better in discussing the tone of the poem. Competent answers noted the details that 'brought all of humanity to the same point, despite their religion', as one noted. There were some detailed and developed responses to Jove's presentation, with one pointing out that Swift paints a picture of reaction towards Jove's presence before his actual appearance. Some learners commented on the use of first person and other features of form such as asyndeton. Other sound answers discussed the ways in which humanity has offended, 'in their arrogance and their pride', so that many essays had some grasp of Swift's intentions. Good answers explored the style in detail; the verse form, the rhymes and the imagery were often well discussed. Very good answers analysed poetic methods in detail and were able to explore their effects with insight and perception, so that some answers at this level showed very good understanding of Swift's tone and were able to explore 'the humour of his satirical attacks on

religion and humanity in general', as one suggested. Where such insights were supported by precise textual support and some appreciation of appropriate contexts the answers did very well. understanding of Swift's tone and were able to explore 'the humour of his satirical attacks on religion and humanity in general,' as one suggested. Where such insights were supported by precise textual support and some appreciation of appropriate contexts the answers did very well.

Question 8

GILLIAN CLARKE: Selected Poems

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

- (a)** There were too few responses to this question to be able to make general comments on performance.
- (b)** This was a relatively popular choice. Nearly every answer had some relevant points to make on Clarke's presentation of the mother and daughter. Weaker answers tended to offer generalised summaries of the poem, often with some engaged personal response, though at times too far removed from the poem itself. Better answers at this level did see the conflict in the relationships, though were at times confused by some of the imagery. For example, the birth was understood by the majority, but many missed these implications and struggled to grasp the imagery of the umbilical cord. More competent responses offered quite diverse readings of the mood with many seeing the mother as conflicted between love or protection and resentment or fight for identity. There was generally more attention to the mother with fewer comments on the presentation of the daughter, though some considered her to have a 'strong will' as reflected in the description of her hair. Good answers considered the tone of the poem. One, for example, thought 'the atmosphere cold and spiteful', whilst another felt there was a 'stern mood as though the mother resented the girl'. Appropriate context did help some learners who knew of Clarke's daughter and some other wider knowledge was brought in at this level, such as links to *Babysitting*. Good answers were able to explore the structure of the poem, 'starting in the birthing suite of the hospital and ending at home, but still battling to become separate', as one put it. Other good answers analysed the metaphor of the umbilical cord in detail, Clarke's use of the 'language of conflict – defiant, struggle, fierce, fighting – all suggesting that there is ongoing issues between them', as one noted. Very good answers explored the tone in detail, with some noting the 'bathos of what has triggered this particular stand off – an extra hour's skating!' as one commented. Very good answers always explored the effects of Clarke's choices in detail – the verse form, the structure, the rhythm and her use of free verse. Many at this level also had a firm appreciation of relevant contexts and were able to structure their thoughts on the poem effectively.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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

Key messages

1. Learners should ensure they address the idea of ‘presentation’ in appropriate questions.
2. Learners should avoid ‘feature-spotting’ at the expense of analysis in their essays.

General comments

There were responses seen at every level of the mark scheme to every text on the paper. The large majority of learners showed evidence of appropriate preparation, with at least a sound basic knowledge of their two texts. Many learners had evidently worked hard to acquire their knowledge and understanding of the texts and these learners were always able to select relevant material to address the given tasks. There were few rubric errors in this session, but it is important that learners understand the optionality on the paper if they are to achieve the best mark possible. The quality of the expression was generally appropriate to the task, with some excellent examples of essay writing seen. Some learners, on the other hand, are at times disadvantaged by a lack of clarity in their writing.

There are two specific issues to be addressed in this session:

1. Many of the questions on this paper refer to the writer’s ‘presentation’ of a specific element in the text or in the passage from the text. Learners should note this requires them to consider the writer’s choices, which may include genre-specific methods such as stage directions, or more general matters of style such as choices of imagery and language. Many less successful answers would be improved by ensuring that these points are considered fully, along with providing evidence of knowledge and understanding of the text.
2. There were a number of learners in this session who used a list of literary terms as a way of structuring their response, particularly on **(b)** questions on poetry. This can be a useful way of approaching the text, but learners should also remember that these terms are not in and of themselves ‘analysis’ of the text. There were many occasions when a term such as ‘asyndeton’ or ‘metonymy’ was followed by an example from the text without any other comment, so that it seemed the learner was ‘feature-spotting’ rather than analysing the effects of the writer’s choices. Learners should always have the effects of the writing, especially in passage questions, as the main focus of their essay.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Drama

Question 1

ARTHUR MILLER: *All My Sons*

- (a) This question was the minority choice on this text. Nearly every response found relevant material with which to discuss Joe Keller, though only the more capable responses could shape their essays to address the given quotation. Weaker answers retold Joe’s story, often in detail, with better answers at this level aware of some of the responses his actions and words might create in an audience, ‘from happiness at his easy way with his neighbours of all ages, to sadness at his tragic suicide’, as one essay concluded. More competent answers were aware of the ‘underlying tension in Joe what ever he is doing, whether worrying about Kate’s clinging to her hopes about Larry or in his exchanges with Chris and Anne about George’, with many exploring the ‘long terms

effects of his lies and treachery to Steve Deever'. Better answers were aware of some of Miller's dramatic methods, such as the contrasting of his relationships, the use of stage directions and the language, 'carefully chosen to create the image of a naïve uneducated businessman, misled by his partner', as one suggested. Good answers developed such arguments with apposite reference to the text and some well-integrated contextual points, often around the post-war culture and the American Dream. At this level answers were always informed by the given quotation and presented well-structured arguments and often thoughtful conclusions, with a wide range of interpretations, so that for some Joe could never be sympathetic 'as he is simply a dishonest selfish man and the play reveals how that dishonesty destroys both him and his family', according to one candidate. Others felt that 'the power of the tragedy comes from the fact that we can sympathise with him, but recognise the inevitability of his fate'. Some very good answers were informed by a perceptive grasp of tragic theory, showing how 'a great man is destroyed because of his tragic flaw, with Miller adhering to the three 'rules' of time, space and character', as one argued. Where such points were supported by close reference to the text the answers did very well indeed.

- (b) This was the most popular **Section B** question on the paper with over one third of the entry choosing it. Weaker answers were often unsure of the context and of the relationship between Ann and Sue, though nearly every answer did find relevant points about Ann to discuss from within the passage. Many weaker answers retold Ann's story, often in detail, with some supporting general comments about her role and characterisation, so that she was for some 'a gentle caring woman, out of place in the Keller's selfish world', though for others she was as 'manipulative as Joe, moving from one brother to the other far too easily'. More competent answers were better focused on the passage, noting her 'kind civility to Sue at first, which changes as Sue reveals her true feelings about the Kellers, especially Chris', as one said. Many answers at this level followed her 'changing attitudes and responses, as she gradually reveals her loyalty and strength through the passage', as one noted. Good answers were able to link these developments to specific dramatic methods, noting 'Miller's use of dialogue as Sue cuts across Ann's comments with patronising interjections, like "dear" and "darling" so that eventually even Ann "bursts out" in frustration', as one summarised it. Other good answers noted the use of stage directions and the contrasts between the two women's attitudes which serve to highlight the positives of Ann's optimistic characterisation', as one suggested. Very good answers noted how 'Ann's innocent responses to Sue develop a sense of uneasiness in the audience, that something is "wrong" in the Keller household after all', with consequent development of dramatic tension and the plot. Some perceptive answers, remembering Larry's letter which Ann has with her, wondered if she 'is as innocent and optimistic as Miller depicts her, or is it simply desperation to achieve some sort of closure, so that Chris has to be perfect and moral for her?' Many very good answers were able to refer to the wider text perceptively as well as supporting their arguments by close reference to the passage and to the wider context of post war American society.

Question 2

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Much Ado About Nothing*

- (a) This was a fairly popular choice of question, with about one fifth of the entry choosing it. Weaker answers listed the various marriages and explained how they had come about during the course of the play, with some awareness of the different characters involved, enabling better answers at this level to consider at least implicitly the contrasts between Hero/Claudio and Beatrice/Benedick. More competent answers developed this further by noting the different attitudes 'these central characters represented, from Hero's submissiveness to Beatrice's independence', as one stated. Such contrasting attitudes were often well explored with supporting quotations from the text. Most answers had opinions on Hero's eventual 'acceptance of Claudio, despite what he had done to her in the church', and saw it as 'evidence of the domination of perhaps even abuse of, women in that period', as one suggested. Good answers analysed the language and dramatic methods in more depth, often finding contrasting quotations to support their arguments or comparing the comic deceptions of Benedick and Beatrice and 'what they reveal about the hidden attitudes towards marriage', as one candidate argued. Very good answers often ranged more widely in the text, noting how 'Don Pedro almost sees tricking Benedick and Beatrice into marriage as a punishment, perhaps as revenge for her rejection of him', for example. Others noted the parental attitudes of Leonato, for example, and how 'Claudio saw the marriage ceremony as the most appropriate place to publicly reveal Hero's "corruption"'. Inevitably, answers which focused on Shakespeare's dramatic presentation of these different attitudes, through analysis of language, imagery and action, did very well.

- (b) This was a popular choice with over quarter of the entry offering responses to this question. Nearly every answer recognised the context and had some relevant personal response to the passage. Weaker answers tended to give too much context in summarising the events before and after this extract, but nevertheless often had engaged and lively responses to 'Hero's despicable treatment by those she trusted', as one candidate noted. Better answers at this level saw the different responses to her plight, contrasting the 'fury and rage of her father (to) the care and wisdom of the Friar', for example. Competent answers analysed the 'extremes of response with the violence of Hero and her father's words contrasted with the more measured, thoughtful speeches from Benedick and the Friar', as one suggested. Good answers also noted the setting, wondered about Beatrice, 'strangely silent at this point', and commented on how 'Benedick is now clearly aligned with Beatrice and her family in his rejection of Claudio and the Prince'. Very good answers explored how 'these discussions enable Shakespeare to develop the plot as well as the characterisations', whereas others explored the 'tone which is hardly comedic and with the constant threats of violence might leave the audience wondering if this really is going to have a comic ending', as one said. Very good answers were also aware of how the audience 'already aware of Hero's innocence might be relieved to see her family rallying around her', where others thought a more modern 'feminist audience might be appalled at her lack of fight, Beatrice's silence and their reliance on the men to sort the situation', as one commented. Where such arguments were supported by close reference to the passage and appropriate contexts, the answers did very well.

Question 3

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

This was very much a minority choice on the paper with very few responses on either option.

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

Question 4

THOMAS MIDDLETON AND WILLIAM ROWLEY: *The Changeling*

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

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

Section B: Poetry

Question 5

ROBERT BROWNING: Selected Poems

This was a minority choice of text in **Section B** with only a small number of responses, the overwhelming majority of which opted for the (b) passage question.

- (a) There were too few responses to this question to be able to make general comments on performance.
- (b) Nearly every answer had some relevant ideas with which to address the task. Weaker responses retold the story of the poem in their own words, with some comments on the speaker of the poem, 'who seems to be narcissistic and delusional throughout', as one suggested. Better answers at this level noted that Porphyria 'does not have a voice at all and so we see the events from the speaker's point of view only', but most answers at this level tended to focus on the characters and the narrative, with only passing mention of Browning's poetic methods. More competent answers noted how 'the speaker moves between describing what Porphyria did and his own sullen mood',

with some charting 'his changing moods from heart break, silence, joy, murderous control and final perverse acceptance', as one suggested. Good answers moved beyond character points, exploring Browning's use of pathetic fallacy, the contrast between the 'homeliness of the cottage and the violence of its owner', his use of language and imagery and how 'the "tenderness" of the closing scene, Porphyria apparently asleep on her lover's shoulder creates a terrifying Hitchcock like horror, in the reader', as one said. Very good answers considered a wide range of poetic methods, analysing Browning's use of dramatic monologue, changes of tone and tense, his narrative versification and use of 'rhymes to emphasize the shock of the action for the reader', as one noted. Such answers invariably supported their arguments with precise quotation and a clear understanding of appropriate contexts.

Question 6

OWEN SHEERS: *Skirrid Hill*

This was a relatively popular choice in this session, though the overwhelming majority opted for the passage question option (b).

- (a) There were very few responses to this question. Most answers were able to select relevant poems to discuss, with popular choices being *Amazon*, *The Hill Fort*, *Late Spring*, *Trees* and *Inheritance*. Most learners were at least able to summarise their selected poems, showing some understanding of Sheers's concerns. Better answers did consider his methods, though often in a partial, generalised way. The few better answers seen did have some awareness of his choice of language and imagery, and occasionally some appreciation of appropriate contexts.
- (b) This was much more popular with over one fifth of the entry answering this question. Nearly every answer had some knowledge and understanding of the poem, with many also aware of appropriate social and historical contexts. Weaker answers tended to offer a general summary of the poem's content or a line-by-line paraphrase. The success of these approaches depended on the supporting comments and the understanding of the concerns explored in the poem, with unemployment, change and nature the most common discussion points. Competent answers were able to explore Sheers's use of contrast for example, in more detail, often focusing on the 'how he describes the factory as "dead" and "lifeless", but full of the natural life such as sheep and birds', as one suggested. Other answers saw the 'contrast between the work in the factory and the work out in the gym', as one cleverly noted. Answers which considered his poetic methods in detail did better. Language and imagery were often well analysed, as was his use of tercets. Very good answers looked at the effects of these choices, supporting points with precise references to the detail of the poem and appropriate contexts.

Question 7

Songs of Ourselves, Volume 2

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

- (a) This was a minority choice overall. Most learners were able to select relevant poems to discuss with Wilfred Owen's *Futility*, Siegfried Sassoon's *The Death-Bed*, Thomas Hardy's *A Wife in London* and George Gordon, Lord Byron's *Darkness* all popular choices. Weaker answers summarised and paraphrased their chosen poems, often in detail, and with some implicit comparisons, at least. Better answers at this level chose contrasting poems so that some awareness of different poetic methods was more easily discussed. Competent answers often structured their essays around a series of contrasts, of subject, concern and methods most typically. Good answers were able to analyse the methods more closely with some supporting details from the poems, with often engaged personal responses. Very good answers developed such ideas by exploring the effects of the writers' choices, Byron's use of the night and Owen's use of the sun, for example. Contextual support was quite rare but in some very good essays enabled the learners to show perceptive understanding of how style and context can work together to create meanings, but in different ways with different poets.
- (b) This was the most popular question on the paper, with around half of the entry choosing it. Weaker answers tended to paraphrase some of the details of the poem or offer general responses discussing relationships, often with personal engagement. At this level there was, in nearly every case, some evidence of knowledge of the poem and at times understanding of some of Browning's

concerns. Few though were able to explore the overall ‘argument’ of the poem or Browning’s poetic choices with confidence. More competent answers often noted the poetic form, a sonnet, and were able to make some relevant contextual points. At this level there was a clearer grasp of the structure of the poem and how Browning moves from ‘ordinary reasons such as beauty or pity for love, to love for love’s sake’, as one summarised it. Language, imagery and poetic form were often discussed at this level, though without a clear grasp of the effects of those choices on the reader. Good answers were able to explore the effects, as well as offering a more developed analysis, often showing perceptive understanding of the overall purpose of the poem. There was also some very well focused contextual support at this level, most often biographical, but crucially shaped specifically to the poem itself. Very good answers did all of this within a well-developed structured essay, often presenting a personal, but analytical interpretation of the poem, noting, for example, ‘the intimacy of the personal tone, how the speaker is at the same time individual and universal, in cutting through the usual tropes of love poetry to argue for a love everlasting’. Where such arguments were supported by precise reference to the poem and supporting contextual detail, the responses did very well.

Question 8

GILLIAN CLARKE: Selected Poems

This was a minority choice of text in **Section B** with only a small number of responses, the overwhelming majority of which opted for the **(b)** passage question.

- (a) There were too few responses to this question to be able to make general comments on performance.
- (b) This was a relatively popular choice overall. Most learners were able to discuss the relationship in some detail, often showing knowledge of the text and some understanding of Clarke’s general concerns. Weak answers often paraphrased the poem, with some basic comments on the meaning lifting answers at this level. There were a number of unusual interpretations, with some learners seeing ‘her guilt over these early sexual experiences’, as ‘proven by the shelling of peas together’, as one suggested. More convincing responses were able to follow the development of the relationship, leading up to ‘her disappointment at only being funny’, as one commented. Competent answers explored, for example, Clarke’s use of telling detail such as the Aertex shirt and the smell of the saltfish, with some linking this to appropriate contextual points. Other sound essays explored some of the poetic method, most commonly the use of language, the poetic form of the poem and the imagery ‘of nature and green highlighting the naturalness and innocence of their relationship’, as one suggested. Good answers were alive to the shifting narrative voice ‘from adult nostalgia looking back to childish disappointment’, as one said. Others confidently considered the use of pronouns, the way Clarke depicts the setting and ‘how she creates a sense of time past, of the speaker’s yearning for lost innocence’, for example. Very good answers offered a structured argument, developing the analysis perceptively and using it to explore the effects with sustained insights into possible interpretations.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/21
Prose and Unseen

Key messages

- Responses which rely on a summary of texts or extracts are not successful.
- Successful responses focus on how writers communicate the meaning and content through their choices of language, structure and form.
- Successful responses employ specific references and quotations to support points in essays. In **(a)** questions, secure selections from the text are required to support points made in answer to the question.
- Successful responses to **(b)** passage questions analyse the writing of the selected extract in great detail.
- In the Unseen questions, successful responses show how the literary features of the specific text type communicate the meaning and contribute to the reader's or audience's understanding of the passage or poem.

General comments

In **Section A: Prose**, there were responses to all the set texts, although *Atonement* and *Stories of Ourselves* were again the most popular. A number of responses to passage-based questions on *Stories of Ourselves* and *Petals of Blood* suggested that candidates had limited knowledge and understanding of how the selected passage related to the wider story or novel. Nevertheless, there were some excellent responses which demonstrated an advanced appreciation of the choices made by writers and the resultant effects on readers. A very close focus on the details of the writing is a prime requirement of the passage-based **(b)** questions and candidates struggle when they restrict themselves to a discussion of content. However, **(a)** questions focus on how writers communicate and the literary methods they employ, meaning that successful candidates respond to these questions too in a way which engages with analysis of literary methods. For all answers, candidates will be more confident if they are familiar with subject-specific terminology to discuss the writers' craft – structure, characterisation, setting and imagery, for example, can all be discussed confidently in a closed book examination.

The poems were the most popular choices among the **Section B: Unseen** questions, and candidates seemed ready to discuss language and literary methods. They should be encouraged to use the same skills when discussing prose and drama. It is useful to think about the narrative perspective and paragraph structure of prose texts, as well as details of language. With drama, candidates should pay attention to any stage directions as well as the dialogue, and demonstrate an awareness of performance and audience.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Prose

Question 1

Ian McEwan: *Atonement*

- (a)** There were few responses to this question, with most answers concentrating on Part 2 of the novel and Robbie's experiences as he moves towards Dunkirk. Nearly all candidates referred to the leg in the tree, while other references included the plane attack, the general destruction and the humiliation of the retreat. More confident responses went further, including the kindness of the

French farmers, the rescue of the RAF man from the aggressive crowd of soldiers and Briony's hospital experiences. Few candidates went beyond this section of the novel to look at the build-up to war in Part One and the aftermath in the remainder of the novel, including the Marshalls' wealth, attributable to the wartime success of the amo bar, and the decline of country houses such as the Tallis'.

- (b) A significant number of candidates wrote about the Tallis marriage as an example of perfect harmony, suggesting a limited knowledge of the rest of the novel. This meant that they missed the subtext in the passage, taking the dialogue at face value. More perceptive responses were aware that phrases such as 'neutral tone' and 'not an unkind word' show the tensions and deceptions between Emily and Jack Tallis. Some noted the hypocrisy and evasions in the patronising 'Dearest' and 'my dear' and the signs of a *modus vivendi*, as, while there is 'a trace of affection', Emily waits for a time when Jack will be 'home for ever'. Some also commented on the characterisation of Jack, taking patriarchal control at the end of the passage, even though far distant from the house.

Question 2

Mark Twain: *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

- (a) Few candidates wrote about Tom Sawyer, but most of those who attempted the question recognised his role as a foil to Huck. They noted Huck's involvement in Tom's fantasies in the early part of the novel before Huck becomes disenchanted with them, and argued that this early maturing is confirmed through Huck's journey with Jim, from which Tom is absent. The point was made in a number of essays that Twain brings Tom and his games back into the novel towards the end in order to demonstrate how childish he remains, while Huck by that stage has a much clearer understanding of human nature, and though he goes along with Tom, is much more mature.
- (b) Responses to this question often focused on a comparison between the characters of Miss Watson and Pap. More successful answers considered how Twain's writing presents the characters and Huck's responses to them, while less competent essays presented narrative summary, rather than using the skills of analysis. Students commonly focused on the image of the floating corpse and Huck's realisation that he may still be in danger from Pap, with the most confident responses exploring how these aspects are presented in Huck's distinctive narrative voice. These answers considered his questions at the beginning of the second paragraph and his careful consideration of his experiences, leading to what he 'judged'. They also looked at how Huck's unease is conveyed in the final paragraph, based on his observations and what he 'knew'.

Question 3

Stories of Ourselves, Volume 2

- (a) Cruelty was interpreted quite widely by candidates, which made the question very accessible. The cruelty of racism was considered with *The Black Ball* and *The Paper Menagerie*, the cruelty of employers in *The Axe*, and of class and society in *The Doll's House* and *Death in the Woods*, for example. Less successful responses tended to identify the cruelty in the characters and events of the stories without considering how the cruelty is presented in literary ways. More successful candidates considered the effects of the first person narrator in Ellison's and Liu's stories, revealing a particular perception of the cruelty and the hurt it causes. There was comment also on the details of the union man's burn in *The Black Ball* and the neighbours' dialogue in *The Paper Menagerie*. Some candidates commented on how Anderson compares the long list of cruelties to the old woman with the behaviour of the butcher and the dogs, while there was also awareness of how Kezia's character is used by Mansfield as a hopeful counterpoint to adult cruelty. There was also some capable discussion of the official style of the narration of *The Axe*, initially mimicking the style of office reporting to emphasise the lack of compassion.
- (b) Unusually, there were far fewer answers on the passage question. Several candidates who answered it did not seem confident in their knowledge of Hardy's story which meant that they missed the significance of aspects of the extract and its foreshadowing. Candidates often interpreted 'background' to mean 'setting', and successfully addressed this in their essays, looking at the presentation of a rural area and the military camp. More confident responses considered the time as well as the location, placing the narrative 'ninety years ago'. They recognised that this sense of remembering, and noting what has changed and what has not, is a crucial opening for the narrative. Strong answers discussed Hardy's creation of a sense of history, with the evocation of

the now vanished military camp, with the details of sound and elaborate, outmoded uniform. They also considered the narrative voice, telling a story which is not his own, but which he has gained from 'Phyllis', from 'her own lips', at a great age. This gives the reader a direct line to the original story, spoken by its protagonist, but also separate and detached, through a different narrator's voice. Candidates who explored this area were very successful.

Question 4

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o: *Petals of Blood*

- (a) There were too few responses to this question to make a general comment appropriate.
- (b) There were very few responses to this question, and these tended towards narrative summary rather than analysis of the writing. Some commented on how Munira's arrival in this passage contrasts with his first arrival in Ilmorog, where his tenacity as a teacher is doubted. Some commented on the more optimistic tone, with the warmth of Nyakinyua's greeting, the gathering of pupils in the school and the feeling that Munira 'carried the wisdom of the new age in his head.' Some noted how the villagers' comment that 'This one will stay' contrasts the earlier view directly, and some alert essays noted Ngũgĩ's inclusion of words such as 'homage', 'reverence' and 'a light nod or a smile' to show the warming relationship between Munira and the residents of Ilmorog.

Section B: Unseen

Question 5 – Prose

Most candidates answering the question on the prose passage successfully identified the tone and mood of the piece, though a number did not recognise that the young woman is considering ending her life. These were in contrast to those who picked up the hints in the writing, such as 'She stooped over the last step and placed something on it – possibly a letter', and the watchman's thoughts about 'unmistakeable signs', 'police' and 'gruesome details' which create 'the worst possible reputation to a tank'. Candidates who moved beyond a narrative account of the passage noted how the woman's situation is developed through dialogue, and they often expressed sympathy for her predicament, desiring study rather than marriage. Some also commented on the limited compassion of the watchman, who takes time to talk to the woman, but is conscious of 'the dinner that he was missing' and does not fully understand her situation, urging her to 'Marry ... and may God bless you with ten children.' Others noted that he is 'sixty-five years old' and from an age whose values are detached from the young woman, giving him old-fashioned attitudes towards women and marriage, as well as shock that her study costs what for him is a 'month's salary'. By these details the writer presents the generational divide between the two characters and shows why he 'comprehended very little of all this situation.' Some candidates noted how the passage presents the woman's determination, in her repeated 'No, no', the phrases 'she retorted angrily' and 'She glared at him', and the direct opposition between 'I don't want to marry' and 'I want to study' at the end of the passage. These details present another side to the woman whose face is 'wet with tears', who 'began to sob', 'sputtered' and 'broke down again'. Some perceptive candidates noted how other details in the passage contribute to the mood, including the ominous and symbolic sunset in the 'faint splash of red on the western horizon', and the oblivious fisherman who sits 'sadly gazing on his rod.'

Question 6 – Poetry

While most candidates attempting this question recognised that the poem is a sonnet (though others claimed there was no rhyme scheme), few examined how the sonnet form is exploited in the division between the octave and the sestet. Candidates who paid attention to the form and structure usually teased out the thoughts of the poem successfully, while others struggled, with some clear misreadings. Successful answers noted the elements of competition between the love of the narrator and the other in the octave, the speaker finding that the other's love is 'Outsoaring' and 'loftier' despite the fact that they 'loved ... first'. While the speaker's love 'was long', the other's love 'seemed to wax more strong'. Observant answers noted the suggestion of confusion in 'what might or might not be' and the dismissal of these comparisons in the last line of the octave with 'Nay, weights and measures do us both a wrong.' Some commented that the language indicates that love cannot be precisely calculated. Candidates alert to the structure, therefore, noted that the sestet offers the resolution, dismissing the separateness of 'mine' and 'thine', of 'I' and 'thou', in favour of 'both and both', leading to the climactic line which asserts that love 'makes us one.' It was a poem which repaid very close observation of structure, matched with an awareness of language. Many candidates who did not carefully follow through the process of thought in the poem became confused, often asserting that the poem presents a critical and pessimistic view of love.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/22
Prose and Unseen

Key messages

- Responses which rely on a summary of texts or extracts are not successful.
- Successful responses focus on how writers communicate the meaning and content through their choices of language, structure and form.
- Successful responses employ specific references and quotations to support points in essays. In **(a)** questions, secure selections from the text are required to support points made in answer to the question.
- Successful responses to **(b)** passage questions analyse the writing of the selected extract in great detail.
- In the Unseen questions, successful responses show how the literary features of the specific text type communicate the meaning and contribute to the reader's or audience's understanding of the passage or poem.

General comments

In **Section A: Prose**, there were responses to all the set texts, although *Atonement* and *Stories of Ourselves* were again the most popular. A number of responses to passage-based questions on *Stories of Ourselves* and *Petals of Blood* suggested that candidates had limited knowledge and understanding of how the selected passage related to the wider story or novel. Nevertheless, there were some excellent responses which demonstrated an advanced appreciation of the choices made by writers and the resultant effects on readers. A very close focus on the details of the writing is a prime requirement of the passage-based **(b)** questions and candidates struggle when they restrict themselves to a discussion of content. However, **(a)** questions focus on how writers communicate and the literary methods they employ, meaning that successful candidates respond to these questions too in a way which engages with analysis of literary methods. For all answers, candidates will be more confident if they are familiar with subject-specific terminology to discuss the writers' craft – structure, characterisation, setting and imagery, for example, can all be discussed confidently in a closed book examination.

The poems were the most popular choices among the **Section B: Unseen** questions, and candidates seemed ready to discuss language and literary methods. They should be encouraged to use the same skills when discussing prose and drama. It is useful to think about the narrative perspective and paragraph structure of prose texts, as well as details of language. With drama, candidates should pay attention to any stage directions as well as the dialogue, and demonstrate an awareness of performance and audience.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Prose

Question 1

Ian McEwan: *Atonement*

- (a)** Most candidates agreed that justice is served very unfairly in *Atonement*. Essays suggested that Briony deserves some proper form of justice, rather than just a life-long guilt; that Robbie is very unjustly treated by the law and then by war, as is Cecilia; that other characters are unjustly treated, especially Lola and Paul, who, candidates felt, should have been punished in some way. In discussing these areas, most essays showed a good knowledge of the novel, its events and characters, though not all these paid due attention to the question's focus on 'ways in which

McEwan explores 'justice'. The creation of characters and management of the plot is part of this exploration, certainly, but many candidates would have been more successful had they been more aware of McEwan's choices as a writer, rather than Briony's, Robbie's, Lola's and Paul's choices as characters. Some responses successfully incorporated discussion of the metafictional aspects of the novel, pointing out that its version of events has been invented by Briony as her way of re-allocating justice as far as possible. In this consideration of the power of the author, fewer noted that Briony herself is invented by McEwan, instead arguing that there is a 'true' version of the events of the novel. The few who did consider McEwan's overall authorship usually came to the conclusion that he illustrates through *Atonement* that true justice is impossible.

- (b) The passage was a little more popular than the (a) question and most candidates commented on the change between Briony as a girl in Part 1 and the nurse depicted here in Part 3. In some cases this led to a broad discussion of Briony's maturing and her attempt to atone for her 'crime' against Robbie, without very much close discussion of the passage, despite the imperative to 'Comment closely'. Many saw the soldier as a representative of Robbie for Briony, more confident answers looking at the portrayal of her care through her breathing, 'gentle' treatment and disguise of her own feelings. Some candidates developed these aspects of the passage further, teasing out the ambiguity between Briony focusing on someone other than herself for once, and the portrayal of her treatment of the soldier consciously presenting a better version of Briony to the reader. This type of answer showed keen awareness of Briony as character and narrator, able to manipulate the story in her favour. The strongest responses used this awareness of Briony's controlling narration to examine details of the passage, such as Briony's refuge in her childhood with the reference to the 'tablecloth trick', while others commented on the consciousness of her writing, with the grotesque imagery of 'an overripe banana' and 'bunches of red grapes' showing her relish for language.

Question 2

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o: *Petals of Blood*

- (a) Most essays responded to the question on the struggle for freedom by summarising aspects of the narrative, retelling the events of the novel, rather than focusing on the writing and presentation. There was, though, some clear discussion, particularly of Wanja and her struggles. Candidates considered the ways in which her rejection of conventional roles in setting up her own brothel and therefore assuring her own security, was, in itself, a type of freedom. Others considered Abdulla and his fight for freedom with the Mau Mau, followed by the betrayal of that struggle. Most responses included some contextual discussion of British colonial rule, and the further neo-colonialism implemented through educational policy and economic practices. Candidates discussed the struggle to overcome these, particularly when the independent government continues to restrict access to freedom. Some candidates interpreted freedom more widely, with interesting results. For example, some focused on Munira and Wanja to discuss freedom from dysfunctional families, while others looked at Karega to discuss freedom from unjust imprisonment. The Ilmorog villagers' walk to the city was often used to focus the discussion of freedom from poverty and capitalist attitudes.
- (b) Many answers on this passage were unaware of its ironies. Most responses took it at face value and claimed that it was a celebratory passage extolling the virtues of economic progress for Ilmorog, usually citing 'Progress!' at the beginning of the second paragraph. Those who noticed the 'trembling' of the 'old woman' often dismissed her as too old to appreciate the beneficial changes. Such a reading showed a significant lack of knowledge of the rest of the novel and the context of this passage. The few more perceptive responses noted that the 'old woman' is Nyakinyua, who is presented as a touchstone of tradition and community throughout the novel, which gives significance to her doubts about progress. Some noted that the peasants' fascination with the bank man's 'adam's apple' was a sign that they are misled by appearance and that they lack comprehension of what they are told. While significant changes do happen in Ilmorog, noted in the repetition of the adjective 'new', some essays noted that the sequences of short fragments, such as 'Milk. KCC. Wealth' carry a tone of bitter irony. This, strong candidates noted, is particularly apparent in the division of land which has been owned and farmed for centuries – 'Demarcation. Title deeds. Loans. Fencing the land. Barbed wire.' As one candidate commented, the final phrases sound more like a prison. More essays showed understanding that Njuguna's story gives a pessimistic twist, with his sons 'almost coming to blows' over the now divided land. Very few candidates noted the shift between the central paragraph and the final one, the penultimate one

ending with 'we waited for the flowers to bloom' and the final one referring to power cuts, a sad reflection on the outcome of Ilmorog's 'progress'.

Question 3

Stories of Ourselves, Volume 2

- (a) There were very few responses to this question, but those who opted for it chose to focus on stories such as *The Axe*, *The Lady's Maid's Bell* and *The Black Ball*. Some answers relied on descriptive summary of the chosen stories, but more assured responses were built around comparison between poor relationships, seen in *The Axe* and *The Black Ball*, for example, and a strong relationship in *The Lady's Maid's Bell*. There was discussion of the heartlessness of Singlebury's sacking in *The Axe*, which does not recognise how dedicated he is to his job and the way this is manifested in his grotesque and horrifying ghostly appearance at the end of the story. Essays also looked at John's relationship with Mr Berry in *The Black Ball*, which is outwardly polite but masks racism, shown as one candidate commented, in the fact that Berry can only look at John as he is reflected in the brass of the door John has been polishing. The role of the union man was also a significant part of the discussion of the realities between employers and employees. Candidates commented that the relationship between Hartley and Mrs Brympton in *The Lady's Maid's Bell* is portrayed as mutually supportive despite the clear hierarchy between them.
- (b) The passage question on *The Black Ball* was extremely popular, though a number of candidates related the whole story instead of focusing on the selected passage and the question. There were also examples of candidates being confused about a narrator who is also a character within the story and tried to separate the two. More confident essays recognised that the first person narration gives direct access to John's thoughts, emphasising his care as a parent. Perceptive responses showed how the social context of 1940s America is apparent in his language, which is always conscious of colour, particularly 'black' and 'white', and how he defines his son as 'a little Negro boy'. Some essays charted the change in tone through the passage, from the pensive beginning to the rise in tension as the boy goes missing, and finally the relief as he is found. Some responses also discussed the symbolism of the black ball itself, while the imagery of freedom in the 'flock of pigeons' was recognised. Some suggested that the 'bird that flapped its wings like an eagle' was an image of the debasement of the American eagle, which does not offer freedom to all citizens. Some candidates noted that John's residence in 'quarters' suggests quite limited workers' accommodation, but that this space gives him an elevated position with 'a view in all directions.' This attracted comment on the idea that the narrator, despite his lowly position in society, has more awareness and observation than others, also seen in his educating himself by reading his 'book' – though few remembered the significance of the particular book he is reading.

Question 4

Mark Twain: *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

- (a) There were few responses to this question. In response to the question on 'boyhood', there were several very narrative accounts of the novel, while some other essays were restricted to covering just the first few chapters. Stronger responses considered how the opening of Twain's novel establishes the youth of Huck, and then discussed how his boyish perceptions of the world inform the rest of the novel. Some made the point that although a boy, he has more understanding and compassion than most of the adults in the novel, and that he matures considerably on his journey down the river with Jim. Some referred to the re-emergence of Tom Sawyer at the end of the novel, and how Twain therefore creates a reminder of the childish pranks of boyhood which Huck has grown out of.
- (b) There were few responses to this question. Those candidates who selected it responded well to the passage and explored the violence of the incident, appreciating the sense of inevitability as the scene unfolds. Many candidates showed how Twain creates the suspense of the incident, together with a kind of awed humour until the moment when Boggs' daughter arrives on the scene. The most successful answers showed a strong awareness of Huck's perception and narration, with his vivid descriptions of Boggs' 'a-raging' with his 'gray hair a-flying', as well as his child-like inclusion of 'Bang!' for the gunshots. There were some thoughtful points made about Huck's view of the adult world and his illustration that a poor man can be shot dead with impunity by someone important, 'a heap the best dressed man in that town'. Candidates argued that this was another example of

Huck's realisation that the adult civilised world is deeply flawed, and that the daughter's arrival, throwing herself 'on her father, crying, ... he's killed him', is a deeply shocking moment.

Section B: Unseen

Question 5 – Poetry

Twice as many candidates opted for the poetry unseen as chose the drama passage. A large number struggled to interpret the title, with some arguing that it is ironic, as the poem is clearly not a sonnet. Others asserted that the poem is well over thirty lines long, despite the line numbers on the page. Those who recognised that the 28-line poem is two sonnets placed together and used that idea to interpret the structure were in a minority. A substantial number of candidates also thought that the term 'sonnet' refers to content, and that this therefore must be a love poem, rather than it being a poetic structural form. The situation described in the poem was recognised by most, though candidates were in disagreement about whether the poem refers to two children or three. A departure or death was usually recognised in the second half, though many assumed this was of a partner, rather than the first child, as they missed the key repetition of 'most loving'. Successful responses recognised the two-sonnet structure and noted that the three children are described in the first sonnet, with approximately a quatrain devoted to each of them. There was some concern about a parent who admits to loving one child 'most', and discussion of the contradiction between the reluctance to 'boast' and the rhetorical questions which follow, elevating the stature of the son. There was some confusion about line 2, with many candidates interpreting the phrase the opposite way round, suggesting the man is still childlike, when the line states that he is 'a child', and a 'man' only 'in seeming'. Some answers showed that though the eldest son is the favourite, each of the other children is recognised for their particular qualities – one 'the beauty of our home' and the other 'most intelligent'. It was noted, though, that the second child is still compared with 'her dear brother' and many were concerned about the description 'Puny and elf-like' for the third child. Many candidates picked up the indication of something temporary in the word 'lent', though few recognised that this word, with its repetition, marks the shift between the two sonnets and marks the separate direction of the second. Some candidates assumed that the 'many mansions' referred to better housing, or university. Since 'many mansions' is a culturally-specific reference, Examiners accepted this interpretation. There were some very detailed examples of recognition of the Christian imagery of heaven and these therefore recognised that the eldest child has died. Many candidates noted the tone of mourning in this section of the poem, citing 'heart-broken and alone' and 'my grief'. However, strong responses also noted the hope in 'Love never dies' and the suggestion that the parting will be temporary and the family will be reunited in heaven where all sing 'The never-ending hymn of prayer and praise.' Some interpretations of the final lines were skewed by misreading 'morn' as 'mourn' and candidates not recognising the original meaning of 'awful' as 'awe-full', and assuming the throne is in some way appalling.

Question 6 – Drama

The unseen drama passage was chosen by half as many candidates as the poetry question, and it was generally handled with greater confidence. There were, though, some widely differing interpretations, with some misreading the tone and suggesting that Christine and Mrs Prout have an aggressive, intolerant relationship. Many essays worked through the extract and made sensible observations about the dynamics of the relationship revealed through the dialogue, but there were also some very strong answers with subtle and perceptive analysis, beginning with the opening stage directions. These noticed that the set indicates fashion and wealth, and therefore the literary success of the author whose dwelling it is. There were also sharp comments on the fact that Christine is 'seated' and 'ready for work', whereas Mrs Prout is 'preoccupied' on her arrival, dressed informally in 'a plain morning gown' and sits 'away from the table', clearly disinclined to work. Successful candidates discussed how much is communicated before a word of dialogue is spoken, including that the atmosphere is relaxed between the two women, but Christine appears the more professional of the two. A close examination of the dialogue noted that the hierarchy of employer and employee is always apparent in the use of 'Mrs Prout' and 'girl', but the frankness of the conversation and Christine's observations about Mrs Prout's lateness and bad sleep indicate a friendly, relaxed relationship. Equally, Mrs Prout values Christine's opinion and declares that 'one day... you will come to employ a secretary of your own.' There were some very subtle and persuasive essays which argued that Christine is in fact in charge of the exchange, despite being the employee. They noted her early readiness for work in contrast with Mrs Prout, and that she seems ambitious, having worked for three novelists and an MP. It was argued that her close awareness of Mrs Prout's writing, and that she pats the book 'maternally', indicate that she feels she has a role in its creation. While Mrs Prout is dismissive of 'that wretched thirty-thousand word thing', it is Christine who gets her to work with 'Shall we begin, Mrs Prout?' It was also noted that Christine has the longer speeches in the extract, suggesting a greater control of the dialogue. Christine is exact, whereas Mrs Prout is criticised in the papers for her poor grammar, which is ironic for a successful

writer. Very few candidates considered the reasons for the butler's departure. It is not, as some suggested, that he is given the menial task of cutting the book's pages, but that he is asked to cut the pages of 'such a book'. That, and Christine's witty response about 'The Methodist Recorder', indicate that Mrs Prout owes her success to the writing of rather risqué romances.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/23
Prose and Unseen

Key messages

- Responses which rely on a summary of texts or extracts are not successful.
- Successful responses focus on how writers communicate the meaning and content through their choices of language, structure and form.
- Successful responses employ specific references and quotations to support points in essays. In **(a)** questions, secure selections from the text are required to support points made in answer to the question.
- Successful responses to **(b)** passage questions analyse the writing of the selected extract in great detail.
- In the Unseen questions, successful responses show how the literary features of the specific text type communicate the meaning and contribute to the reader's or audience's understanding of the passage or poem.

General comments

In **Section A: Prose**, there were responses to all the set texts, although *Atonement* and *Stories of Ourselves* were again the most popular. A number of responses to passage-based questions on *Stories of Ourselves* and *Petals of Blood* suggested that candidates had limited knowledge and understanding of how the selected passage related to the wider story or novel. Nevertheless, there were some excellent responses which demonstrated an advanced appreciation of the choices made by writers and the resultant effects on readers. A very close focus on the details of the writing is a prime requirement of the passage-based **(b)** questions and candidates struggle when they restrict themselves to a discussion of content. However, **(a)** questions focus on how writers communicate and the literary methods they employ, meaning that successful candidates respond to these questions too in a way which engages with analysis of literary methods. For all answers, candidates will be more confident if they are familiar with subject-specific terminology to discuss the writers' craft – structure, characterisation, setting and imagery, for example, can all be discussed confidently in a closed book examination.

The poems were the most popular choices among the **Section B: Unseen** questions, and candidates seemed ready to discuss language and literary methods. They should be encouraged to use the same skills when discussing prose and drama. It is useful to think about the narrative perspective and paragraph structure of prose texts, as well as details of language. With drama, candidates should pay attention to any stage directions as well as the dialogue, and demonstrate an awareness of performance and audience.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Prose

Question 1

Ian McEwan: *Atonement*

- (a)** Less successful responses to this question tended to summarise the events of the novel rather than engage with how McEwan explores guilt. Stronger answers were based on a selection of specific incidents within the novel which clearly deal with guilt. Most essays focused on Briony's guilt for her actions which condemn Robbie, and the way that guilt drives her to attempt to atone for that crime. This often led to a discussion of the nature of the narrative itself, with particular reference to the final part of the novel. Those with a wider scope also discussed Paul Marshall and

Lola, considering Paul's guilt for the assault and some arguing that Lola bears some guilt for her silence. Candidates contrasted their lack of remorse and punishment with Briony's atonement. Other responses also considered McEwan's characterisation of Robbie, as a young man assumed to bear guilt when he is in fact innocent, as another point of contrast within the novel. One or two answers suggested that Jack and Emily Tallis bear some guilt for their absent parenting and Jack's 'hobby' of paying for Robbie's education, only to drop him suddenly on the assumption of his guilt.

- (b) The most successful responses to this question examined the presentation of the characters and Briony's play very closely, and used that detailed analysis to comment on the narrative mode of the novel. Large numbers of candidates, though, took the opportunity to discuss narrative and metanarrative with only passing and general reference to the passage, which is an unsuccessful approach to a (b) question. When candidates focused on McEwan's writing, there were perceptive and appreciative discussions of the characterisation of Briony and Lola, examining the competition and shifts in power between the two girls. Dialogue was seen as a key to this, with Briony's voice 'constricted and more high-pitched than usual' as she claims the directorship of the play, and Lola's 'hooted' 'Sor-reeeee' mocking her. Many candidates noted that the twins' leaden delivery ruins the script, but few appreciated the humour in the description of reading 'as though each word was a name on a list of dead people'. Very few noted the realisation of the events of the play as if real in II.20-25, which provides such a contrast with the rehearsal itself, though some did note the humour in Briony's choices of inappropriate words in the dialogue, such as 'extrinsic' and 'Evanesce', showing her early experimentation with language and the beginnings of her writer's ambitions. Several answers explored the extract as a microcosm of the novel, with the forbidden love affair foreshadowing that between Cecilia and Robbie, while many characters discover that 'The world... can rise up and tread on you.' In a strategy which was very successful when built on close discussion of the writing of the extract, several candidates showed their awareness that this version of the rehearsal of the play is a part of Briony's own retrospective narrative, and that she is shaping the event to suit her own purposes, particularly in her presentation of Lola.

Question 2

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o: *Petals of Blood*

- (a) There were too few responses to this question to make a general comment appropriate.
- (b) Responses tended to focus on this extract narratively, with only the most successful treating the content analytically. Stronger essays identified ways in which Abdulla's intelligence and understanding of the land and animal behaviour are presented as being greater than physical strength, and the impact this realisation has on the children watching. They also noted his newfound authority in the passage, from the moment of his imperative 'Wait!' Successful answers looked at the detailed precision of Ngũgĩ's description of his taking of the catapult, selection of stones, casting of soil, making of sounds, aiming and shooting, described as 'a magic act in a dream.' Astute comments were made on the impact of the last short sentence of the paragraph, 'The rest was easy', after the build up and tension throughout. There were comments on Abdulla's recalling of his Mau Mau role, resulting in a 'glitter in his eyes'. Successful candidates discussed how the lame man on his 'support-walking stick' is transformed in the villagers' eyes through these actions, giving Abdulla new status in the community which elevates him to an almost godlike status by the end of the extract. There were also observant comments on how this evocation of the old freedom-fighting spirit creates a strong sense of community in the group as they 'had a feast' and the old people are 'reminiscing over old times and places.' Some responses would have benefited from consideration of the context of the passage, and the importance of this community spirit in the journey to the city.

Question 3 – *Stories of Ourselves, Volume 2*

- (a) There were very few responses to this question. Candidates who attempted it tended to refer to *The Black Ball*, *The Lady's Maid's Bell* and *The Axe*, though there were also a few on *Death in the Woods*. Discussion of the Wharton story was often particularly successful, as candidates discussed the nuanced relationship between the mistress and maid. This often allowed them to compare a favourable portrayal of an employer compared with critical depictions in the other stories.

- (b) A far greater number of candidates answered the question on the passage from *Gabriel-Ernest*. Candidates often focused successfully on the ominous nature of the boy and the ways in which he is presented throughout the extract that lead to Van Cheele's suspicions being raised. A key focus for this was 'hunting four footed' and 'childflesh', which were picked up in many essays. Less successful responses were dominated by narrative summary, focusing on a linear exposition of the growing doubts in the extract. More confident answers focused on the nuances of the language that the boy uses as the impetus Van Cheele's doubts. A very few answers commented that Van Cheele's suspicions lead him the wrong way, convinced that the boy has a 'clever poacher dog', and that he remains oblivious at this stage to the idea that the boy is actually a werewolf. Many candidates, including those who asserted that Van Cheele is already coming to the werewolf conclusion, missed the humour of the extract. Opportunities were missed to discuss ways in which Saki makes Van Cheele a figure of fun through his pomposity and imperceptiveness, while the reader is always ahead of him.

Question 4

Mark Twain: *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

- (a) There were too few responses to this question to make a general comment appropriate.
- (b) There were few responses to this question, but most answers made some sensible comments about the end of the novel. Less successful essays considered what the characters had done in earlier parts of the novel but did not specifically refer to the selected extract in any detail. More confident work demonstrated how Tom remains a leader who likes adventure, but also likes to 'boss' Huck and Jim around. This often led to a useful discussion of how Tom has changed little from the novel's opening, while the other two have undergone significant changes. There were, though, some interesting points made about how Huck has learned to treat Jim with respect, but is still willing to entertain 'howling adventures amongst the Injuns'. The strongest responses looked closely at the interactions between the three characters, commenting for example on Jim being 'so patient' about his imprisonment. Jim's compassion, apparent in his revelation of keeping Pap's death secret from Huck, drew thoughtful comment about character, as well as a way in which Twain draws the last threads of the story together.

Section B: Unseen

Question 5 – Prose

This was a popular choice of unseen text, often tackled by candidates with some critical confidence. While a significant number of responses tended towards paraphrase, many discussed the extract with sensitive engagement. Answers often discussed the passage in the light of current debates about gender identity, which was successful when based on a close discussion of the writing of the passage. Few candidates commented on the strangeness of Anil having 'bought' her brother's name, but there was appreciation of the presentation of her spirited refusal to bow to the astrologer's suggestions. Some commented on how her independence of choosing her name is clearly at odds with the cultural traditions apparent in her parents' visit to the 'astrologer-soothsayer'. They suggested that readers are likely to dismiss his ideas of 'the addition of an e' and therefore be sympathetic towards Anil. Strong answers looked closely at the language, dialogue and structure to show how Anil is presented through the three distinct paragraphs, the first on her childhood, the second clarifying the retrospective perspective on her adolescence and the third focusing on her leaving the family home to pursue her medical career. Most essays discussed ways in which Anil changes as she grows older, candidates sometimes comparing her rage with her family with their own experiences, with comments on the 'bodily anarchy' and the imagery of 'shuttlecock' and 'minefield'. There were some observant comments on how that imagery compares with the verbs 'swam', 'calmed and sailed', which demonstrate Anil's ease once her parents' relationship has broken down and she is free to pursue her own dreams. While she is free to make her own choices, some candidates commented on the irony that by studying 'medicine', she is probably fulfilling her parents' ambitions. Some candidates also commented thoughtfully on the change from what they often saw as fluid gender identity in the first paragraph to her distinction between male and female traits in the medical profession and her view that, overall, 'Women doctors were more confident in chaos and accident'. The final sentence of the passage seldom received attention, but some candidates commented on how the 'dead child' awakens Anil's own compassionate feelings about the relationships between parents and children, despite, or perhaps because of, her own upbringing.

Question 6 – Poetry

The poem was a little more popular than the prose passage and many candidates wrote well about it, usually recognising the time and tone shift between the two stanzas. There were some less successful essays which attempted a summary of the content of the poem, and these were not always accurate, but most made at least some attempts to discuss its language and structure. Interestingly, the variations from conventional English, particularly in the first stanza, were often attributed to youth and a lack of education, some expressing surprise that the narrator is later 'writing poetry at Cambridge'. Very few showed an awareness of varieties of the English language in different cultures and geographical regions, and therefore missed the cultural context apparent in the way the poem is written. There were, though, some sensitive discussions of the childish adventure and adult aspiration in the crab-hunting, in 'stalking' and 'like big folk.' Discussion of the crabs' sexual behaviour was usually discussed sensitively as another indication of the children's youth, with Ruby 'feeling strange' and the older speaker 'horrified to pick them up'. Several candidates discussed the aural effects throughout this section of the poem and many saw that the children's preference to take the 'lonesome ones/Who... got no prospect/Of family' is a key indicator of the importance of family to the narrator. Many commented on the simple celebratory nature of 'one big happy curry feed' with Ma, and the image of childish competition between the siblings at the end of the stanza. Noting the changed perspective of the second stanza, successful responses discussed the symbolism of leaving behind a 'mess of bones and shell', representing the casting off of childhood, and the geographical shift from 'savannah' to 'England and America'. Most recognised the melancholy tone, centred around 'Death long catch Ma', and there was thoughtful discussion of the final section about the house. Candidates were sometimes unsure whether the visit was real or imaginary, but discussed the contrast between the sense of life in stanza 1 and the state of the 'boarded up' house, with 'wasps', 'woodlice' and 'weed yard'. The nostalgic vision of 'the pot still bubbles' was noted by many candidates, who also noted that the description 'crustacean-old' links Ma directly back to the crabs. There were some sensitive comments on the emotional power of the ending and the speaker's excuse that it is 'woodsmoke and curry steam' which might make him 'cry', rather than sorrow and loss.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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

- Candidates who write at length often do so because they have failed to take a strategic view of the question and plan their answers. In many cases, brevity and conciseness would serve candidates better.
- Candidates need to be reminded about what is expected in order to fulfil the requirement for contexts and the consideration of other possible interpretations of the texts.
- Candidates need to be aware of – and write about – the particulars of these texts as plays, as works designed to be seen on a stage, not read in a classroom.

General comments

Please note that this component is taken by a relatively small number of candidates. This means that Examiners may not have seen a full range of achievement on each question.

It was clear from almost all but the most basic responses, that candidates had enjoyed the study of these texts. The vast majority had a clear understanding and appreciation of what they had seen and read. At the lower levels knowledge and understanding was often restricted to matters of plot. Better scripts demonstrated an ability to select what is relevant in order to create a coherent argument that addressed the question, supporting these points with close reference to particulars. The best answers were clear and incisive, often showing individual readings of the plays or making interesting and original links across the text discussed.

Analysis of the text is one of the key features of a good answer for this paper. With less good responses, this analysis tends to stay with character and theme. However, the best responses really engage with what the writer is doing by talking explicitly about how moments are shaped for effect. This means that in **(a)** questions there needs to be steady focus on detail of language, structure, and style, with points supported by quotations that are analysed. Many **(a)** essays contained little or no quotation. Some candidates could usefully be reminded to name the writer occasionally, and comment on what he or she is doing. Some **(b)** essays lacked sufficient analysis of the passage. The passage is printed so that candidates can use it to make detailed observations about what the writer is doing. It must be the central focus of the essay. Although the **(b)** questions ask candidates to refer to the play as a whole, the passages are chosen because they will allow candidates to take details from them to exemplify the larger patterns that they have observed. Candidates should be wary about taking a line-by-line, rather than a strategic approach to the passage.

Candidates should be reminded the importance of Assessment Objective 4 (Communication). They need to provide a text that is coherent and develops an argument. The best candidates, of course, do this automatically. But when marking some responses, examiners struggled to see where an argument was going or found that points were repeated rather than developed. For candidates at the lower end, there is also the difficulty that they find it hard to select relevant material and suitable examples. This often leads to answers that are narrative in feel, with critical, analytical points buried amidst story telling or description of characters. Answers of this type are often very long. Candidates would do better to think carefully about the requirements of the question. A couple of sides of critical observations far outweigh longer, more digressive pieces. Teachers may find it useful to pose the question to their candidates: 'Would you have learned something about this play by reading the essay you have written?'

Candidates need to be very aware of what is meant by context. Examiners distinguish between 'background', which is not highly rewarded, and contexts that are relevant because they allow a candidate access to a deeper understanding of what is going on in the text. Thus, biographical matters related to the author are rarely useful because the link between biography and made work of art is often tenuous. Some questions obviously require engagement with context – it would be difficult, for example, to ignore the context of

colonialism in *Indian Ink*, or the historic tensions in Venice between Jew and Christian in any question that involved Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*. Where contexts are less obvious, candidates must make a choice. But the important thing is that the context should be relevant to the question asked.

It can sometimes be useful for candidates to contextualise a (b) passage within the text itself, in order to establish why the passage is a crucial turning point in the development of plot, character or action.

At this level, candidates should be aware of different possible interpretations of texts or parts of texts in order to fulfil Assessment Objective 5 (Evaluation of opinion). Better candidates will be able to interrogate the opinions of others and explain why they see these different views as either helpful or challenging in terms of their own interpretation of a text. Some questions provide an opinion and then explicitly ask candidates 'how far do you agree?'. But with other questions, candidates have to work consciously to incorporate and use others' opinions. At the lowest level, some candidates simply quote a critic and then move on. This is not sufficient for achievement of AO5. With a drama paper, candidates can refer to particular productions or refer to literary critics. But they must use these points actively to further their own arguments. It is possible, too, to use a theoretical framework (there were references to Jung and Freud in many essays on *King Lear*, for example). But the central issue is that others' opinions must be integrated and the basis for argument. At its most straightforward, a candidate can simply note that 'Another possible reading of this moment is ...' or 'This scene could be interpreted in a variety of different ways ...', without the need to specify a critic. But the best candidates will engage with specific opinions that have been put forward by others. Some candidates forget to give their own interpretation of the text, so they need to be reminded that their answer should not simply be a collation of others' views.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Shakespeare

Question 1

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *The Merchant of Venice*

- (a) Most responses showed an awareness of the contrasts between the three casket scenes. Less good responses tended to take a narrative approach and describe each of Portia's suitors. Many responses spent a lot of time on how Portia is victim to her father's manipulation, linking this to the patriarchy: although relevant and a clear context, it tended to dominate at times. Only the best candidates were able to quote from the relevant scenes and clearly discuss the language that Portia uses. A number of candidates contrasted – to good effect – Portia's role-playing here with the freedom she gets in her role as a lawyer.
- (b) Candidates were usually well-equipped to demonstrate the significance of this scene. Again, the patriarchy made itself felt with observations about how Portia's Belmont self is romantic and idealised, whereas here, allowed a masculine voice, she shows herself to be clear-thinking and analytical. Many responses noted that there are hints of this in her treatment of her lovers elsewhere. If taken out of context, Portia's words in this passage are full of high sentiment; in context, they are a manipulation to her own advantage. The best answers focused on the situation, not Portia, with candidates engaging fully with how the system is stacked against Shylock. Many responses examined Portia's 'Then must the Jew be merciful.' Fewer candidates went on to the next line to suggest that there is no reason why he should. Many high-end responses speculated about whether the whole process is actually legal, as Portia is not really a lawyer, and that led to discussions about bonds and promises in the play. A few responses talked – legitimately – about Shylock as a victim. At times these responses spent too long explaining the context of 16th century Venetian values, sometimes at the expense of really engaging with the detail of what is going on in this particular passage.

Question 2

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *King Lear*

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

Section B: Drama

Question 3

ATHOL FUGARD: *The Train Driver and Other Plays*

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

Question 4

SHELAGH STEPHENSON: *An Experiment with an Air Pump*

- (a) Candidates saw that the responsibility of scientists towards a wider society suffuses both time periods in the play, thus making clear reference to the structure of the text. Many responses argued that the true scientists often have scant regard for the human in their quest for knowledge. Discussions of the modern sections often emphasised the fact that science can be misused. There was often discussion of the polemical discussions between Tom and Kate. Some responses centred on the relationships between the central characters to demonstrate that scientific discovery comes at a personal cost. Candidates were often able to discuss the French revolution as a means of arguing that scientific discovery has had positive consequences for the working classes. Many candidates pointed out that science forms part of society, that it cannot be thought of as existing in a vacuum – as the title of the play suggests. Many responses discussed the treatment of Isobel at length – and to good effect – as an example of ethical boundaries being crossed.
- (b) Most candidates showed awareness of this moment as being the end of the play, the summarising of what has gone before. Contrasts were often made between the way past and present are juxtaposed here, as they are elsewhere in the play. Many responses discussed the thematic parallels between the periods, with their shared confusion about the future ('groping blindly over the border in a fog of bewilderment', and 'uncharted lands') and the wonder about whether in both cases they face '*celebrations*' or '*riots*'. The best answers were, of course, aware of the tone of the ending and its ambiguity, where none of the issues raised by the play are resolved. Surprisingly, very few responses looked at the circularity of the action of the play, where '*ISOBEL, in her coffin, has taken the place of the bird in the air pump.*'

Question 5

TOM STOPPARD: *Indian Ink*

- (a) Candidates recognised that there are a wide variety of Indian characters in the play, and in addition, that the 'modern' Indians are not the same as their predecessors. Responses often talked with confidence about how the Indian characters are portrayed by contrasting them with the emotionally repressed British. There was often discussion, too, of how the Indians (Das and the Rajah in the 1930s scenes) have been 'Englished-up', in contrast with the Indians who appear in the scenes set in the 1980s. Many useful discussions centred on the presentation of pictorial art and poetry in the play as a means of demonstrating how the Indians have a philosophical view of the world that is not shared by the British. The best answers were able to use particular scenes from the play to back up ideas and to quote with relevance and accuracy. Contexts were well understood, and many candidates appreciated that the characters, indeed the play as a whole, might be differently interpreted.
- (b) A small number of candidates thought that Durance was Indian, an error that fatally undermined their answers. Others recognised that he is representative of the conventional British in India, quick to point out that 'the game is different here' to those who step out of line. He is seen as hard working, limited in imagination, slightly paranoid – and needy in his repressed way as he attempts to charm Flora. He also represents a counterbalance to Flora's romanticised, tourist view of India. Very few responses noted that, despite her liberal values, by this point in the play Flora is starting to behave much like the memsahibs of colonial India: she's happy for Durance not to be so 'stuffy', but content at the same time for him to 'wangle the Daimler' so she can go to the all-white British club. The contrast between the two characters was rightly seen to demonstrate that the British are variously presented in the play. There was sometimes mention of Mrs Swan and her attitudes too as a means of demonstrating the variety of Britishness explored. Responses often failed to use the

passage to full advantage. At times, candidates needed to be more aware that the passage should form the central focus of a **(b)** answer, not simply be a starting point for a general discussion.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/32
Shakespeare and Drama

Key messages

- Candidates who write at length often do so because they have failed to take a strategic view of the question and plan their answers. In many cases, brevity and conciseness would serve candidates better.
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- Candidates need to be aware of – and write about – the particulars of these texts as plays, as works designed to be seen on a stage, not read in a classroom.

General comments

It was clear from almost all but the most basic responses, that candidates had enjoyed the study of these texts. The vast majority had a clear understanding and appreciation of what they had seen and read. At the lower levels knowledge and understanding was often restricted to matters of plot. Better scripts demonstrated an ability to select what is relevant in order to create a coherent argument that addressed the question, supporting these points with close reference to particulars. The best answers were clear and incisive, often showing individual readings of the plays or making interesting and original links across the text discussed.

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Comments on specific questions

Section A: Shakespeare

Question 1

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *The Merchant of Venice*

- (a) The question about sympathy for Shylock provoked many interesting responses. Candidates were aware that he is negatively presented because of his resentment about the way that he has been treated. And yet at the same time there was a strong willingness to engage with the view that the Christians in the play have much to be blamed for, particularly with the unnatural punishments he is made to suffer at the end of play and with the loss of his daughter, Jessica. The best responses were able to engage with detail, often offering close analysis of the built-in prejudice (and illegality) in the trial scene. Weaker responses tended to be more general, less likely to examine specific examples.
- (b) The best candidates responded to the question about the 'ring' scene at the end of the play with confidence and clear understanding. They noted that this is the moment where Portia really tests Bassanio; they were keen to draw parallels between this scene and the trial scene in order to demonstrate Portia's intelligence and autonomy. These responses were also able to consider the tone of the scene, with its change from the seriousness of the trial to the more light-hearted atmosphere here. Less good responses took the scene much more seriously, failing perhaps to recognise that the audience fully understands the dramatic situation and can thus see that this is merely a 'mock' trial which will lead to reconciliation.

Question 2

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *King Lear*

- (a) The contrast between Edgar and Edmund proved an interesting challenge for most candidates. At the lower end, responses sometimes centred on simply providing two linked character studies or talking a lot about how Edmund is resentful. More profound answers often saw links between Edgar and Cordelia and talked about how the brothers respond differently to Gloucester, a parallel with the main plot of the play in its discussion of parents and children. The best responses engaged with the difference in language of the brothers, often looking at how it is difficult to separate dissimulation and deception from sincerity, a point that can also be made about the disputes between King Lear and his daughters.

- (b) All candidates were able to see that this scene is a turning point, the moment during which Lear finally realises that he has been cheated and that Goneril and Regan are ‘unnatural hags’. Some responses were sympathetic to the daughters, noting that his behaviour throughout the early part of the play is egocentric and already on the verge of madness. Others were less forgiving and saw the pair as deliberately and cynically pushing Lear towards insanity. The best responses were able to deal with the coolness of the language used by Goneril and Regan set against the wild imagery and exaggerations of their father. The best responses made constant close reference to the text provided, with clear links to elsewhere in the play, as required by the question

Section B: Drama

Question 3

ATHOL FUGARD: *The Train Driver and Other Plays*

- (a) Strong responses were able to work through the presentation of feelings of guilt with close reference to the three plays. They were able to connect the presentation of the feeling of guilt to wider context, with reference to apartheid and how things had not changed even after apartheid for most people. These answers also evoked the responsibilities of government through focus on context and through reference to prejudice with which South Africans grew up. However, less successful responses often showed strong reliance on narrative summary, with focus on literal understanding of guilt as evoked in the different plays and applied to the various characters. A small number of candidates chose only one play, thus limiting both the range and depth of their response.
- (b) Most responses focused on the feelings of hope that Veronica attempts to show, while evoking the inability of Manneljie to react with any positivity. His inability to understand his mother’s economic and personal situation was pointed out by a number of candidates who connected their particular situation to the wider context, to the South Africans who had left home for better prospects. A wider exploration of context might have generated better answers for this question. The best responses engaged with the action of the scene as well as the language, often arguing that the monologue (with interjections in this case) about an evoked past is entirely typical of Fugard’s technique in these plays.

Question 4

SHELAGH STEPHENSON: *An Experiment with an Air Pump*

- (a) There was a wide variety of responses to this question. All candidates had plainly thought about the presentation of science in the play, and they were quick to make connections across the different time periods. The best responses paid careful attention to – and explored – the quotation given. This usually took the form of seeing how science in any age is a product of the contexts and the philosophical interests of its times. These contexts were usually expressed in terms of society, but some candidates also located the issue more personally by talking about Isobel’s fate or argued that the experiment with an air pump is, in fact, a metaphor for the whole play. The most convincing responses made close reference to the text and discussed how the issue is created in dramatic terms during the play’s action.
- (b) Most responses were able to explore the power dynamics at work in the relationship between Fenwick and Susannah, both here and elsewhere in the play, underlining that the latter is frustrated and unfulfilled, as seen through her snappy interactions with Fenwick and Harriet. There was much discussion of Susannah as a victim of her times, powerless to fulfil her potential. At times the modern marriage in the play was discussed for contrast both in terms of attitudes and power relationships, with the modern – female – scientist seen as a parallel with Fenwick in order to show how roles the dynamics between women and men have changed. Wider family tensions in the Fenwick family, aside from the central relationship, were not often discussed. Some very good answers explored the fact that Susannah chooses to air her dissatisfactions in public rather than in private.

Question 5

TOM STOPPARD: *Indian Ink*

- (a) Candidates at the lower end tended to offer answers that were narrative rather than analytical. Stronger answers were able to see how Stoppard uses Mrs Swan dramatically: she provides the background to Flora's life; she is a walking example of the colonialist who makes no apology for empire and its consequences. Most candidates made reference to the scene where Mrs Swan meets Anish Das, a scene which was sometimes seen as resigned and friendly, sometimes as a demonstration of Mrs Swan's limitations and old-fashioned attitudes. Strangely, few candidates responded to her dealings with Pike, which demonstrate her more liberal, humorous side and her desire to retain a sense of her sister as a human being rather than poet or academic resource for Pike's career ambitions. The best responses also, of course, dealt with the issue of retrospection and the skill with which Stoppard cuts dramatically between the present reality of 1930's India and the post-colonial perspective of the 1980s.
- (b) A small number of responses focused only on the general issues of the play, without ever really getting near the detail of what is going on at this particular moment. Better responses were able to make something of Stoppard's technique of buttressing episodes from the past with those in the present. This, of course, allowed response to methods but it also led to discussions of the ways in which Stoppard fills in Flora's background through Pike's commentaries. The best responses noted that Pike has all the information (including the thank-you note accumulated during this scene) and yet still fails to convey the reality of Flora's life. Candidates were able to use the discussion between Pike and the Rajah to demonstrate how attitudes and values have changed in the years since Flora's death.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

<p>Paper 9695/33 Shakespeare and Drama</p>
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Comments on specific questions

Section A: Shakespeare

Question 1

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *The Merchant of Venice*

- (a) Only a small number of candidates tackled this question. In general, they were confident about the issue of justice in the play. Most wrangled – with various degrees of depth and success – with the trial scene in Act 4. The best candidates argued that what disguises itself as justice is, in fact, a conspiracy between the state of Venice and its Christian citizens to frame and humiliate Shylock. Many responses noted that the trial is illegal as Portia/Balthasar has no legal authority. Some responses diverted themselves into more general discussions about prejudice and injustice that were not altogether relevant. There were some useful discussions about the relationship between money, power and justice. Only the best answers were able to deal with the trial scene in detail, pointing out how the outcome represents the law, not justice.
- (b) A small number of candidates spent too much time discussing the patriarchy and seeing Portia as victim of her father's will. Some noted that she is both articulate and crafty at this point in the play, and certainly not subservient, as the vast majority of the lines are hers. Bassanio, who one might imagine to be the worthy suitor, hardly responds. Many candidates made connections with other parts of the play where Portia is independent, articulate, and certainly her own woman. The question asked about 'methods and concerns' so Portia did not need to be the central focus, and for some able candidates the discussion was centred round the many choices that characters make in the play, or on how romantic love presented in Belmont is contrasted with the more hard-hearted realities of Venice. A number of candidates argued that Portia's personal testing of Bassanio's love comes from the ring test at the end of the play, not here. Some responses made useful points by contrasting Portia at this point with the character she presents when others think she is a man.

Question 2

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *King Lear*

- (a) Although there were many fine and interesting responses to this question, many candidates did not address the fact that the quotation is not a critical comment, but rather it comes from a character in the play (Gloucester) who is trying to make sense of what has happened, whilst also excusing his own behaviour by blaming the gods. The play is entirely without gods who intervene, with fate and destiny determined by the characters themselves through moral blindness and a lack of self-

awareness. There were many good discussions of how Lear's authoritarianism (and incipient madness) sets the whole action in motion without a need for intervention from the gods. At the lower end, candidates often resorted to character study or to simply telling the tale of woe as a means of illustrating horrific events. The spiritual journeys of Lear and Gloucester towards self-awareness were often well illustrated. The best responses were able to focus discussions on key moments and talk about the language of the play. Discussion of the divine right of kings as a context was often relevant, as was discussion of ideas of people being fixed in their position in nature.

- (b) Most candidates focused on the state of mind of Lear and presented their own understanding of the 'transactional' relationship that Lear had had with his daughters, and its consequences for his words and behaviour in the extract printed. They pointed out that Lear's 'madness' as shown here is the result of a deal that had not worked out, but also that its root lies in an inherent fault or instability within Lear himself. The element of loyalty was explored in connection to Kent and Edgar, who were contrasted with Lear's unfaithful daughters because of their kindness and loyalty. Able responses were able to comment in detail on the mock trial, the imagery that Lear uses about his daughters and refer to the events which lead to this moment. The best responses were able to make connections across the text as a whole. A few candidates who scored higher marks were able to use a Marxist lens to evoke the power imbalance that leads to Lear's delusional state and prevents him from seeing past his superiority complex. There was some useful discussion of the scene through the lens of productions/videos that candidates had seen. Very few candidates sought to talk about Lear's madness after this scene. This was – by far – the most widely answered question on the paper.

Section B: Drama

Question 3

ATHOL FUGARD: *The Train Driver and Other Plays*

- (a) There were very few answers to this question. Candidates noted that sympathetic listeners play a significant role in these plays as a means of allowing the central characters to reveal their stories by providing a sympathetic ear. Their compassion brings hope and redemption. In *The Train Driver*, Simon is the listener who acts as a mediator to lead Roelf towards self-healing. At the end of *Have You Seen Us?*, Henry is able to turn self-hatred into more positive feelings about himself with the help of Adela. The best responses saw the issue as one of theatrical technique, as Fugard's means of allowing characters to develop and reveal themselves through the interventions of others.
- (b) Candidates were able to talk clearly about the significance of the monologue in these plays as a means of self-revelation. The best responses were able to engage with the language of the passage, with the pausing uncertainties to demonstrate the trauma he has undergone, with his gradual working through of his own guilt towards an understanding of Red Doek's oppression under apartheid. The question asked for 'elsewhere in the plays', and there were many connections made either through technique (the monologue) or by noting that Fugard is dealing with both political realities and human responses to suffering.

Question 4

SHELAGH STEPHENSON: *An Experiment with an Air Pump*

- (a) Candidates saw that the responsibility of scientists towards a wider society suffuses both time periods in the play, thus making clear reference to the structure of the text. Many responses argued that the true scientists often have scant regard for the human in their quest for knowledge, giving the treatment of the canary and of Isobel as examples. Discussions of the modern sections often emphasised how science can be misused. There was often sensible discussion of the polemical discussions between Tom and Kate. A small number of candidates also mentioned Phil, with his untrained 'man in the street' view of science. Many responses centred on the relationships between the central characters to demonstrate that scientific discovery comes at a personal cost. Candidates were often able to discuss the French revolution as a means of arguing that scientific discovery has had positive consequences for the working classes. Many candidates pointed out that science forms part of society, that it cannot be thought of as existing in a vacuum – as the title of the play suggests.

- (b) There were many interesting and varied responses to this question. Some focused on relationships, others on the way that issues are discussed in terms of the traditional 'arts/sciences' divide. Many pointed out that Tom is reflective, whilst his wife is not particularly concerned with the rights and wrongs of what she does. The best responses were able to link this scene to other moments in the play where characters are used to reveal attitudes towards life and science through what they think and do. Many answers raised the issue of past, present and future, placing Tom's caution against Kate (and by implication Armstrong's) unshakeable belief that 'potential' and the future is all that matters.

Question 5

TOM STOPPARD: *Indian Ink*

- (a) Candidates were asked about the presentation of England in the play. Candidates were aware of the colonial context of the play and the tensions evoked between India and England in both the modern and the historical scenes. There was often much focus on how an awareness of England and its culture has captivated Das, for example. More complex responses also noted that although Mrs Swan seems to represent the 'old' values of the empire, she also has a house full of mementos of India during the Raj, which symbolises, perhaps, the unwillingness of the British to let go. The best responses made careful reference to specific scenes, often seeing Flora as stuck in the middle, unable to relinquish her Englishness, unable to truly understand Indian life and culture. Some responses pointed out that, for all her protestations about liberal values, she often demonstrates the values of the memsahib as she is a tourist in India keen to feel atmosphere, less keen to understand the complex relationship between herself and the British empire. Contexts of empire were understood and often exploited to good effect.
- (b) Most responses were able to engage with the complex ambiguities of the passage presented. At the lower end, there was often a narrative approach. More sophisticated responses dealt with Flora and Das as artists, and with Das's embarrassment at her suggestive flirting ('Am I to lay myself bare before you?'). Only the best responses were fully able to characterise the scene as a light-hearted exchange, with Das too joining in with the flirting ('I am occupied in the folds of your skirt') until the suggestiveness becomes too explicit ('You can imagine it but you cannot mount it ...'). There was often useful discussion of Flora's colonialist attitude, her desire for Das to be '*more* Indian ... not Englished up' as a means of discussing Stoppard's presentation of the consequences of empire. Not many candidates engaged with the presentation and significance of Flora's poem in the extract, despite the fact that her being a writer is central to the play's concerns. Many responses noted – astutely – that the relationship between the two, uncertain and fumbling, is a microcosm of British rule in India.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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

Key messages

- Structuring answers to present a progression of relevant ideas is key to success. Answers that are too long tend to lack a selective or strategic approach. Planning is essential to this to avoid digression, repetition, circling and assertion.
- Supporting detail is important and must be selected carefully and related to key points. Similarly naming or listing critical terminology is at odds with effective analysis. The text and interpretation must lead the critical theories and evaluation, not vice versa.
- Context is important. This includes knowledge and understanding of the genre of the text and its literary context as well as social, historical and cultural understanding.
- Knowledge and understanding of texts underpin good answers but this must be linked to the question for success.

General comments

A high level of engagement and enjoyment was seen in virtually all responses and most candidates demonstrated thoughtful personal appreciation of the texts they had studied. Some original and thoughtful work was seen. Rubric infringements were less frequently seen this winter, although some candidates are still answering on two novels, two poets or two texts from the same time range to their detriment. It is important to check the specification in good time to avoid rubric infringements when planning to teach. For example, it is not possible to fulfil the rubric by teaching two novels such as *Dracula* and *Mrs Dalloway* or *Persuasion* and *The Handmaid's Tale*.

Knowledge and understanding were impressive in the best answers, and this led to some very accomplished responses. In responses working at the lower levels, points of knowledge and understanding were often confined to matters of narrative or lacked security when writing about key details. It may seem basic but weaker responses often seemed to not know key facts – *The Knight's Tale's* Palamon and Arcite were often confused, e.g., over which god they prayed to; also, Luke and Nick were mixed up in *Handmaid's Tale*. Answers that were at least competent displayed the ability to select and use specifics of each text to build relevant arguments with focused support. The depth of candidates' knowledge and understanding underpins confidence in responding to questions and it was very evident to the examining team when candidates held secure knowledge and were able to refer to specific quotations and references with ease and relevance. Some answers given seemed to be preprepared responses to previous questions; it is not helpful to use this approach.

Some excellent and very relevant references to context were seen in better answers, but some responses used aspects of context that were either inaccurate, e.g., 'Dickens was an Elizabethan' or irrelevant. Analysis was varied and the best answers demonstrated an ability to engage with details and use analytical approaches to build purposeful and effective arguments relevant to the question. Where candidates had thought about the use of form, structure and language in specific moments or episodes of the text, relevant, insightful and detailed arguments were made. Critical terminology and reference to techniques must be linked to detail; it is not helpful to list a range of techniques to be used in introductions to essays, or to refer to techniques in general terms, e.g., 'the writer uses metaphors to paint a picture' with no supporting example or reference. Name-dropping techniques without contextualising them is to be avoided. In **(a)** questions it is essential that candidates include relevant quotations and specific references. Some answers offered no details from the texts, leading to generalisation and lack of focus. Successful responses to **(a)** questions make consistent reference to form, structure and language throughout, with points supported by appropriate quotation or reference. Many **(a)** answers in this series featured no quotations at all and sometimes reference to analytical matters was confined to lists of techniques. The best analysis is seamlessly interwoven into strategically planned arguments, using interpretation of technical aspects to build

and inform original and perceptive discussions. In **(b)** answers it is expected that candidates will select and analyse details of the given passage or poem with further illustration from the wider text. Some answers reflected only a passing familiarity with the passage that was printed and offered general and insubstantial responses. The extracts and poems chosen are designed to illustrate aspects of each writer's interests, style and literary concerns and these should be acknowledged and used. A line-by-line approach is to be avoided; better answers clearly select from the extract to create a strategic argument. It can be beneficial for candidates to contextualise a **(b)** passage in terms of the text itself, in order to establish why the passage is a crucial turning point in the development of plot, character or theme.

The most effective personal readings come from insight into, and interpretation of the details of a text. Engagement with a text at a personal level is important in forming a focused argument at this level of study and can be linked to the 'other interpretations' aspect of the mark scheme. The evaluation of different opinions and interpretations, Assessment Objective 5, is an important objective on this paper. Some answers still bear no evidence of engagement with other opinions thereby compromising achievement. At A level, candidates should be able to consider different interpretations and ideas in relation to the texts they have studied. Where this element is done well, candidates build relevant and rigorous explorations of the opinions of others and explain whether these views support or challenge their own interpretation of text. At the lower levels of achievement, some candidates simply quote a critic with little discussion of the impact of their view. Critical views are welcome but must be used to develop candidates' own arguments. Theoretical approaches can work well but cannot be shoehorned into answers and must form part of the whole discussion. References to feminist and Marxist readings were seen, particularly in relation to *The Handmaid's Tale* and Emily Dickinson's poetry. A note of caution in terms of these theories is to be sounded as, while it is possible to explore, for example, a feminist reading of *The Knight's Tale*, it is not helpful to refer to Chaucer as a feminist writer. It is of course possible to allude to other interpretations by suggesting their existence, e.g., 'The writer may be suggesting x, but some might think they mean y' but the best answers engage specific views put forward by others and interrogate these in line with their own opinions.

Organisation of responses is vital to clear communication and a plan, regardless of its form, is essential to a strong answer on this paper. Without a strategic view, some answers stray from the question, lose cohesion of argument or become simply narrative retellings of the plot. Overly long answers often reflect a lack of planning and strategic approach. The best answers are coherent, seamless and focused with concise and clear communication of views. Some work we see reflects eloquent, erudite writing with lexically dense and concise analysis and discussion. Clarity is essential and candidates should be reminded that a few minutes proofreading and editing their work is more beneficial than cramming in another side of writing which may not add to the central argument.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Pre-1900 Poetry and Prose

Question 1

Jane Austen: *Persuasion*

- (a)** This question required candidates to comment on the role of William Walter Elliot. Insufficient answers were seen to comment on the performance of candidates on this question.
- (b)** This question required candidates to write about a passage from Volume 2 Chapter 4, showing what it adds to understanding of the relationship between Sir Walter and Mrs Clay. Insufficient answers were seen to comment on the performance of candidates on this question.

Question 2

Geoffrey Chaucer: *The Knight's Tale*

- (a)** This question required candidates to discuss Chaucer's presentation of different attitudes to marriage in *The Knight's Tale*. Chaucer is a popular text on this paper, but this question was less popular than the **2(b)** option. Candidates tended to write about chivalry and courtly love, with a focus on the love triangle of Palamon, Arcite and Emily. There was some misunderstanding of courtly love and the context of marriage. There was some confusion between Christian and Greek belief systems. Some answers contrasted Palamon as the courtly lover having a 'genuine love for Emily and how to earn her hand in marriage', with Arcite as 'more chivalrous and so wanted to win

her by deeds of valour', hence making marriage a more competitive matter. Emily, whose desire to 'remain single and chaste was only expressed privately', was often seen as a 'symbol of downtrodden, unheard females', even where 'her future and her marriage was concerned'. Very few answers widened their discussion to Theseus and Hippolyta, the grieving Theban widows and the gods. Good answers presented comprehensive arguments about marriage, ranging across characters and with secure understanding of the poem's context.

- (b) This question required candidates to discuss an extract from *The Knight's Tale*, paying close attention to Chaucer's poetic methods. Answers were seen across the mark range to this popular question. Most candidates were able to engage with Chaucer's presentation of Arcite here, particularly his relationship with Palamon and longing for Emily. Sound answers were able to link the presentation to the wider poem, understanding the significance of the passage to the plot. For some the arrival of Mercury was a 'foreshadowing of the gods' interference in the battle at the end'. Straightforward responses discussed Arcite's suffering, often through the prism of courtly love, with some relevant references to specific features. Some answers tended to drift into unsupported and abstract reflections on contextual details and the nature of courtly love, so relevance varied. Basic answers selected some details for comment but were unable to construct an overview of the question within their answer. There was some confusion about Thebes and Athens in weaker answers which also tended to be over-long. Stronger answers made links to the context of knightly behaviour and courtly love. Some personal response was well applied with some candidates engaging closely with Arcite's predicament.

Question 3

Charles Dickens: *Oliver Twist*

- (a) This question required candidates to discuss some of the effects created by Dickens's use of settings in *Oliver Twist*. There were insufficient answers to this question to comment on the performance of candidates.
- (b) This question required candidates to analyse a passage from Chapter 16, considering what it adds to Dickens's presentation of Nancy. A few answers were seen to this question. Most candidates were able to make links between the extract and the presentation of Nancy elsewhere in the novel, engaging with various aspects of her character. Less successful answers tended to focus on a narrative response, paraphrasing episodes where Nancy features in the text with some linking these back to the extract. Some candidates displayed strong knowledge of Nancy's character, but some candidates struggled with analysis of detail in Dickens's presentation of her. Some better answers analysed the dynamic of the dialogue in the extract, focusing closely on Nancy's relationships with Fagin and Sikes. Some misunderstood the relationship, suggesting that Nancy is in love with Fagin or in one answer, that Sikes is her brother. Straightforward comments were made on context e.g., poverty in Victorian London leading to prostitution and the position of lower-class women in society.

Question 4

Emily Dickinson: Selected Poems

- (a) This question required candidates to write about Dickinson's portrayal of the natural world in three poems. There were insufficient answers to this question to comment on the performance of candidates.
- (b) This question required candidates to analyse the poem '*'Twas the old – road – through pain*'. There were insufficient answers to this question to comment on the performance of candidates.

Question 5

John Milton: *Paradise Lost, Books IX and X*

- (a) This question required candidates to consider how far and in what ways Milton presents a sympathetic view of Eve. There were insufficient answers to this question to comment on the performance of candidates.

- (b) This question required candidates to discuss and extract from Book 10, considering what it adds to their understanding of Milton's concerns. There were insufficient answers to this question to comment on the performance of candidates.

Question 6

Bram Stoker: *Dracula*

- (a) This question required candidates to discuss Stoker's presentation of different kinds of journeys. There were insufficient answers to this question to comment on the performance of candidates.
- (b) This question required candidates to discuss a passage from Chapter 11 of the novel, showing what it adds to their understanding of Lucy Westenra's role and characterisation. A few answers were seen to this question. These demonstrated some understanding of Lucy and tended to focus on her role as a victim. Symbolism was discussed including the wreath of flowers and the wolf with links to Lucy's fate, contextual references to the use of laudanum were discussed. One answer responded with a level of personal sympathy to Lucy's situation and the tone of her memorandum.

Section B: Post-1900 Poetry and Prose

Question 7

Margaret Atwood: *The Handmaid's Tale*

- (a) This question required candidates to discuss some of the ways Atwood presents different attitudes to mothers and motherhood in the novel. This is a very popular text, but this question was not as popular as the 7(b) option. Confusion was seen in the least successful answers with some mixing up the characters of Luke and Nick. More secure answers were able to write about the contrast between Offred as a surrogate/actual mother, and Serena Joy as prospective mother; Offred's mention of her own mother; the significance of the birthing ceremony and the wider importance of motherhood to Gilead as a society. Little was seen in relation to Atwood's effects apart from some passing reference to use of flashbacks and Offred as an unreliable narrator.
- (b) This question required candidates to analyse a passage from Chapter 9 considering in what ways it is characteristic of Atwood's presentation of Offred. This was a very popular question and answers were seen across most of the mark ranges. Basic answers tended to track through the passage with some paraphrasing and recognition of features of language without relating these to meaning. Very weak answers struggled to offer relevant context, unsure where the passage fits into the wider text. Better answers recognised the twin timed stories here, 'the blurring of the past and present in Offred's indoctrinated mind', as one answer stated. One or two straightforward responses were able to distinguish between Offred's situation now in comparison to the past. Competent responses offered insights into how the passage demonstrates Offred's plight with consideration of its revelations about Gilead and with appropriate references to the wider novel. Some answers dealt securely with aspects of Atwood's style including reference to her use of first-person narrative, short sentences and 'loaded words'. One sensitive answer remarked about the 'emotion gradually seeping out of the restrained Offred' in a thoughtful personal response.

Question 8

Sujata Bhatt: Selected Poems from *Point No Point*

- (a) This question required candidates to explore how Bhatt presents memories in her poetry. There were insufficient answers to this question to comment on the performance of candidates.
- (b) This question required candidates to write a critical appreciation of the poem *Iris*, considering in what ways Bhatt presents the natural world. There were insufficient answers to this question to comment on the performance of candidates.

Question 9

Jackie Kay: Selected Poems from *Darling*

- (a) This question required candidates to discuss some of the ways Kay explores issues of identity in her poems. There were insufficient answers to this question to comment on the performance of candidates.
- (b) This question required candidates to write a critical appreciation of the poem *Brendon Gallacher*. There were insufficient answers to this question to comment on the performance of candidates.

Question 10

Barbara Kingsolver: *The Poisonwood Bible*

- (a) This question required candidates to discuss some of the ways Kingsolver shapes a reader's response to the Reverend Price in the novel. Very few answers were seen to this question. Weaker answers presented narrative accounts of the Reverend's involvement in the novel's action and concerns with little supporting detail. Better answers explored aspects of his character including his arrogance and controlling nature, especially in a female family. Some convincing personal responses were offered as well as links to context.
- (b) This question required candidates to analyse the effects of a passage from Book 4, analysing its effects and considering in what ways it is characteristic of Kingsolver's narrative methods and concerns. There were insufficient answers to this question to comment on the performance of candidates.

Question 11

Stephen Spender: Selected Poems

- (a) This question required candidates to explore how Spender presents relationships between parents and children in the collection. Several answers were seen to this question. Candidates selected appropriate poems to use for their answers and demonstrated some purposeful and relevant use of analysis and quotation to support developing arguments. Comments on context, including reference to Spender's life, were sensibly applied and linked to relevant details.
- (b) This question required candidates to write a critical appreciation of the poem *A Stopwatch and an Ordnance Map*. There were insufficient answers to this question to comment on the performance of candidates.

Question 12

Virginia Woolf: *Mrs Dalloway*

- (a) This question required candidates to discuss Woolf's presentation of Clarissa in the light of a comment from Peter Walsh. There were insufficient answers to this question to comment on the performance of candidates.
- (b) This question required candidates to analyse the effects of a passage from the novel, considering in what ways it is characteristic of Woolf's narrative methods and concerns. A few answers were seen to this question. One answer tracked through the extract, selecting some points for comment but turning to paraphrase for the bulk of the middle section. One answer presented a secure and insightful discussion of the relationship between Elizabeth and Miss Kilman presented through their dialogue and some of Woolf's narrative effects with a couple of links to the wider novel.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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

Key messages

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- Knowledge and understanding of texts underpin good answers but this must be linked to the question for success.

General comments

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and inform original and perceptive discussions. In **(b)** answers it is expected that candidates will select and analyse details of the given passage or poem with further illustration from the wider text. Some answers reflected only a passing familiarity with the passage that was printed and offered general and insubstantial responses. The extracts and poems chosen are designed to illustrate aspects of each writer's interests, style and literary concerns and these should be acknowledged and used. A line-by-line approach is to be avoided; better answers clearly select from the extract to create a strategic argument. It can be beneficial for candidates to contextualise a **(b)** passage in terms of the text itself, in order to establish why the passage is a crucial turning point in the development of plot, character or theme.

The most effective personal readings come from insight into, and interpretation of the details of a text. Engagement with a text at a personal level is important in forming a focused argument at this level of study and can be linked to the 'other interpretations' aspect of the mark scheme. The evaluation of different opinions and interpretations, Assessment Objective 5, is an important objective on this paper. Some answers still bear no evidence of engagement with other opinions thereby compromising achievement. At A level, candidates should be able to consider different interpretations and ideas in relation to the texts they have studied. Where this element is done well, candidates build relevant and rigorous explorations of the opinions of others and explain whether these views support or challenge their own interpretation of text. At the lower levels of achievement, some candidates simply quote a critic with little discussion of the impact of their view. Critical views are welcome but must be used to develop candidates' own arguments. Theoretical approaches can work well but cannot be shoehorned into answers and must form part of the whole discussion. References to feminist and Marxist readings were seen, particularly in relation to *The Handmaid's Tale* and Emily Dickinson's poetry. A note of caution in terms of these theories is to be sounded as, while it is possible to explore, for example, a feminist reading of *The Knight's Tale*, it is not helpful to refer to Chaucer as a feminist writer. It is of course possible to allude to other interpretations by suggesting their existence, e.g., 'The writer may be suggesting x, but some might think they mean y' but the best answers engage specific views put forward by others and interrogate these in line with their own opinions.

Organisation of responses is vital to clear communication and a plan, regardless of its form, is essential to a strong answer on this paper. Without a strategic view, some answers stray from the question, lose cohesion of argument or become simply narrative retellings of the plot. Overly long answers often reflect a lack of planning and strategic approach. The best answers are coherent, seamless and focused with concise and clear communication of views. Some work we see reflects eloquent, erudite writing with lexically dense and concise analysis and discussion. Clarity is essential and candidates should be reminded that a few minutes proofreading and editing their work is more beneficial than cramming in another side of writing which may not add to the central argument.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Pre-1900 Poetry and Prose

Question 1

Jane Austen: *Persuasion*

- (a)** This question required candidates to discuss Austen's presentation of different kinds of deception in the novel. There were quite a few answers to this question. The best seen demonstrated a wide-ranging knowledge of the novel and were able to find connections between various types of deception, drawing these together to make apposite interpretations regarding Austen's use of structure and form, with some useful links to the novel's title. More straightforward attempts were able to pick out one or two clear examples of deception and explore these with knowledge and understanding. Deceptions used included William Walter and Mrs Clay for the most part with some referring to the general deception that the Elliots were prosperous and their self-deception that they were 'somehow important to everyone else in the novel'. Some candidates seemed to struggle to find a definition of deception, leading to responses that were only partially relevant. Some saw Lady Russell's persuasion of Anne as a kind of deception. There was some sound discussion of Henry Elliot and of Wentworth's description of himself in terms of his true feelings for Anne. Few candidates were able to apply relevant context to their arguments.

- (b) This question required candidates to discuss a passage from Volume 1 Chapter 6 of the novel, showing what it adds to their understanding of the role of Anne Elliot. There were many answers to this question. Most were able to examine the passage in detail, focusing on how Anne's traits are revealed here and in the wider novel. There was some sound discussion about Anne's presentation as a confidante and a trustworthy individual, and her relationship with Mary and her relatives. Some candidates mentioned Anne's ability to 'get on with everyone around her' but also to be a 'positive influence on others in the eyes of the family'. Better answers linked this to her leading role at the 'Lyme incident' that so impressed Wentworth, while one noted that it is 'ironic she is praised for managing Mary's children when it is Wentworth's rescuing her from little Charles that is the first sign of his warmth towards her.' Overall, answers displayed valid and extensive supporting knowledge of the text. A significant number of responses working at the lower end of the mark range tended towards narration and repetition of points. Few opportunities were taken to consider the context of the novel, which was somewhat surprising for this text.

Question 2

Geoffrey Chaucer: *The Knight's Tale*

- (a) The question required candidates to explore how Chaucer presents female characters in the poem. This was a popular question and nearly all responses knew something of the story, with most focusing on Emily and her two suitors. Even weaker responses were able to make contextual links in terms of the position of women in the thirteenth century. Some answers, particularly those in the mid-range of marks, followed a somewhat formulaic structure which tracked through the poem from the Amazonian submission through to Emily's passivity with varying degrees of success. The arguments tended to embody the same idea: women as submissive and dependent on male courage, strength and chivalry, although there were several examples that made a curious case for Chaucer as a feminist champion. There was some twisting of characterisation, particularly of Emily, into an embryonic, modern 'me too' victim with some candidates using this idea as a platform from which to vent personal support for some topical themes of the twenty-first century. Some candidates remembered that it was the women who pleaded for the lives of Palamon and Arcite, but generally the message was that Chaucer presents women as needy, helpless and sometimes beautiful. Many basic and straightforward answers were seen to this question.
- (b) This question required candidates to analyse an extract from the poem, showing what it adds to Chaucer's presentation of Arcite. This was a little less popular than the **2(a)** option and on balance was not done as well. All candidates were able to focus in at least basic terms on the presentation of Arcite in the extract with stronger answers making links to the wider poem in terms of his relationships with Palamon and the gods, as well as his attitude to Emily. Some candidates were too eager to expound on courtly love and chivalry at the expense of dealing with the detail of the passage, however some useful contextual references were seen in terms of knightly behaviour and codes of chivalry where these were clearly linked to the question and passage. There was little reference to Chaucer's style beyond brief discussion of the use of dialogue and description, and little attention was paid to the Knight's comments on where souls go in the last few lines of the extract.

Question 3

Charles Dickens: *Oliver Twist*

- (a) This question required candidates to write about ways in which Dickens explores justice in the novel. This question was quite popular. Most answers showed sound knowledge of the text and some understanding of Dickens's concerns. Weaker answers discussed several aspects of justice in terms of injustice, such as class, treatment of Oliver, Nancy's fate; others discussed the fate of Bill Sikes and Monks. Better answers saw the significance of the punishment of Bumble at the end, but there was common agreement that those who received justice for their 'social crimes ... got off lightly compared to their victims'. Some candidates presented largely narrative responses, and others struggled with what was meant by the concept of justice. There were some strong personal responses to the text. Stronger answers made good contextual links to Dickens as a social reformer and drew details such as the Poor Law into their answers. Some excellent answers covered a wide range of knowledge, demonstrated engaged understanding of Dickens' themes and supported with rich contextualisation.

- (b) This question required candidates to analyse a passage from Chapter 13, showing what it adds to Dickens's presentation of Nancy. There were many answers to this question with a full range of achievement seen. The best had strong understanding of Nancy's character, not only in the given passage, but in ways the episode underpins Nancy's development in the novel as a whole. Some considered how Fagin made her look respectable and contrasted her little performance here with the anguish of her moments saving Oliver and in her murder. Some interpretations discussed the passage as a pivotal turning point in Nancy's characterisation. More straightforward approaches remained within the passage but understood the ambiguity of Nancy's presentation and the torn loyalties she faces. Weak responses often could not grasp the performative aspect of Nancy's behaviour at the end of the passage. Some answers gave insufficient attention to the detail of the passage, with too much retelling of Nancy's wider role. Others struggled to analyse aspects of Dickens's style, a factor that compromised achievement significantly.

Question 4

Emily Dickinson: Selected Poems

- (a) This question required candidates to discuss some of the ways Dickinson explores nature in her poetry. Many responses were seen across the full ability range. Poems used included *A narrow Fellow in the Grass* and *I dreaded that first Robin, so, and I heard a Fly Buzz – when I died* -. The best answers had extensive knowledge of three poems and were able to make intelligent connections between them. Some also incorporated reflections inspired by the quotation at the beginning of the question into their answer in a meaningful and incisive manner. Some answers tackled the inscrutability of Dickinson's work in its relation to nature with confidence, faced the unknowability of nature in her work directly and were comfortable in not having definitive answers to meaning. Candidates knew the poems and considered that Dickinson 'loved nature far more than people', offering some understanding of how 'nature might represent some important themes in her life – freedom, lack of control, humans as observers and violence of the natural world'. There was little reference to style apart from some unspecific references to the use of dashes and capitalisation. The least successful answers spent too much time on matters of tangential significance such as Amherst, not getting published and feminism.
- (b) This question required candidates to analyse the poem *After great pain, a formal feeling comes*. There were many answers to this question with a variety of different interpretations. Many discussed the poem in terms of grief and mourning with some offering quite proficient arguments. The best answers took an inclusive and comprehensive view of pain and suffering and considered how the poem provided a universal voice for those in trauma and turmoil. These answers also offered strong handling of the contextual element, making useful links to Dickinson's own experiences of grief and pain and attitudes in 19th century society. A significant number of answers seemed to struggle with this poem and become lost in speculation and assertion. Some even claimed the poem was written by Dickinson after her death. Some answers were unable to reference other poems from the collection, but those that could range across the collection tended to choose *I felt a Funeral, in my brain, I heard a Fly buzz – when I died* - and *My Life had stood - a Loaded Gun* -. Weaker answers did not consider in detail the specifics of Dickinson's style in the poem, essential in reaching the higher levels of the mark scheme. There was some misunderstanding and tenuous interpretation of 'The Feet, mechanical, go round –' with one candidate suggesting that this was related to Dickinson's bicycle.

Question 5

John Milton: *Paradise Lost, Books IX and X*

- (a) This question required candidates to discuss some of the ways Milton shapes a reader's response to Satan. There were insufficient answers to this question to comment on the performance of candidates.
- (b) This question required candidates to discuss an extract from Book 9. There were some very good answers to this question with effective links to the Bible and the wider poem as well as to Milton's own attitudes. Good knowledge featured strongly with candidates showing ability to distinguish between Adam and Eve's presentation. There were some excellent contextually supported meditations on the ways in which the passage opens the debate on good and evil. Some excellent use of critical views fulfilled the 'other interpretations' aspect of the mark scheme and led to poised

and lucid discussions including some interesting feminist readings used appropriately in several answers.

Question 6

Bram Stoker: *Dracula*

- (a) This question required candidates to comment on Stoker's presentation of Dracula as an outsider. This was quite a popular text, and this question attracted several answers. Some were excellent with strong contextual knowledge and philosophical argument on the nature of the other in Victorian literature whilst still basing the answer firmly in Stoker's text. Quite a number focused on the early sections of the novel in Dracula's castle which, although incisive, did invoke the question of how much of the whole novel some candidates had actually read. There was real engagement in many answers and clear enjoyment of Stoker's epistolary style. Some candidates were well able to link aspects of form and structure to the question. Straightforward and competent answers focused on narrative and characterisation with little reference to style.
- (b) This question required candidates to analyse a passage from Chapter 21, showing what it adds to Stoker's presentation of Renfield in the novel. This question was less popular than the 6a option and fewer responses were seen. Some answers reflected a thin knowledge of Renfield as a character and struggled to present an argument. Some were more keen to focus on Van Helsing's resolve at the end of the passage rather than Renfield. Some saw Renfield as a conflicting character who partly reflects Dracula's bloodthirstiness but also shows his sorrow for Mina. Some better answers explored the imagery in the passage, but consideration of the wider novel was rarely seen.

Section B: Post-1900 Poetry and Prose

Question 7

Margaret Atwood: *The Handmaid's Tale*

- (a) This question required candidates to discuss Atwood's exploration of freedom in Gilead. This was a very popular text and there were many answers to this question. It was clear that candidates had very much engaged with the meaning of the text and its significance in their own experience of the world. The best answers discussed the nature of freedom in pre- and present Gilead with wide ranging knowledge and support from the text. These also often offered incisive reflections on the pervasiveness of Gilead's indoctrination and gaslighting of individuals with some telling textual comparisons with contemporary international politics. These were often able to unpick the hypocrisy and cognitive dissonance at the heart of Aunt Lydia's statement. More straightforward responses discussed the brutal repression of Gilead with some relevance and development of ideas. Basic answers tended to provide sound knowledge of what happened to evidence what Gileadeans, principally the handmaids, were in fact free to or from e.g., 'Free to live according to the rules' and 'freedom from having to make choices'. Many referred to Jezebel's while others commented on the significance of the ceremonies in the light of the quotation. Apart from the best essays, there was little on Atwood's style, but first-person narrative was considered and, in some answers, the structure of the novel in terms of Offred's experience.
- (b) This question required candidates to analyse a passage from Chapter 8 considering the presentation of Serena Joy here and elsewhere in the novel. This was a very popular question. Candidates working at the lower levels struggled to place the passage in the novel's wider context and there was evidence of some misunderstanding. Most were able to identify and explore the relationships and underlying tensions here. Some struggled to pick up on the irony and nuances of Offred's perspective of Serena Joy. Weaker answers paraphrased the passage or retold the story in that part of the novel. Better answers explored the relationship between Serena Joy and Offred, both here and elsewhere in the novel. There was consideration in the best answers of important stylistic elements such as the first-person narrator, the use of symbolism, Atwood's language choices and the use of reported speech from Aunt Lydia. Some also explored the backstory about Pam and what this adds to the reader's response. Some excellent responses combined a close reading of Offred's cynicism with wider reflections on feminism and the role of women exemplified by Serena Joy, both in pre- and present Gilead.

Question 8

Sujata Bhatt: Selected Poems from *Point No Point*

- (a) This question required candidates to discuss some of the ways Bhatt explores childhood experiences in her poetry. There were insufficient answers to this question to comment on the performance of candidates.
- (b) This question required candidates to write a critical appreciation of *A Different History*. There was a significant number of responses to this question. Stronger answers made links to Indian culture and the conflict in the poem in terms of 'the oppressor's tongue'. Most candidates made salient links to Bhatt's own heritage with varying success. Some very good answers were seen that delivered strong discussions of a country influenced by dichotomous cultures and histories. Some answers focused entirely on the first half of the poem and Indian influences. Many value judgements were made against colonialism with varying degrees of support. Those that were supported and fully explained made effective arguments. References to wider text included *Walking Across the Brooklyn Bridge*, *Go to Ahmedabad* and *For Nanabhai Bhatt*. Analysis of techniques was often conveyed in a standalone approach, rather than linking techniques through detail to the wider meaning of the poem. It is unhelpful, for example, to write 'Bhatt uses enjambment here and this proves how important growing up with two cultures was to her'. This disconnection between analysis and the wider meaning of the text was noticeable in many answers.

Question 9

Jackie Kay: Selected Poems from *Darling*

- (a) This question required candidates to write about Kay's explorations of people's hidden lives in poems from the collection. Only a few answers were seen to this question. Poems used to answer included *Brendon Gallacher*, *The Keeper* and *The Underground Baby Case*. Some quotation was used alongside a good deal of contextual information with little on Kay's style or how methods are used to create particular effects.
- (b) This question required candidates to write a critical appreciation of *Compound Fracture*. This was a more popular question than 9a on this text. A wide range of achievement was seen and the uncertain status and whereabouts of the mother in the opening of the poem caused a lot of problems for candidates from which some struggled to recover. Some answers initially stumbled but regrouped to make some intelligent and insightful comments on racism in this poem and others in the collection. The best responses demonstrated a command of understanding throughout and analysed the imagery and symbolism as representations of wider cultural damage and failure. Personal responses were often engaging with candidates responding to the tone of the terrified child, the racist nurse and the demanding, hysterical mother. Some candidates used too much biographical reference to Kay's life at the expense of dealing with the poem and question.

Question 10

Barbara Kingsolver: *The Poisonwood Bible*

- (a) This question required candidates to explore Congolese society and culture in the novel. There were insufficient answers to this question to comment on the performance of candidates.
- (b) This question required candidates to analyse the effects of the writing in a passage from Book 3 of the novel, considering in what ways it is characteristic of Kingsolver's presentation of Orleana. A small number of answers was seen with the best of these demonstrating good knowledge of the wider text to support intelligent commentary of the passage. A couple of answers argued that Orleana is wrong to question her husband. Some responses focused on Orleana's past and her relationship with her daughters as opposed to her own mother. There was some contextual discussion of context through the idea of expectations of women.

Question 11

Stephen Spender: Selected Poems

- (a) This question required candidates to explore Spender's presentation of parents in his poems. Only a few answers were seen to this question. Poems used included *XII, A Father in Time of War* and *Missing My Daughter*. Answers reflected a tendency to remain at the level of narrative summary rather than looking at the poet's craft and choices for presentation. A lack of analysis was a feature of most answers seen to this question.
- (b) This question required candidates to write a critical appreciation of *Darkness and Light*. This was a very popular question. The full range of achievement was seen. Some very good answers used incisive analysis and unpicked the poem through its linguistic and literary features. Unfortunately, many answers got lost in repetition and attempts to establish the meaning of the poem with speculation on 'insecurity about [his] sex life' or 'deciding if he was gay or straight'. Nearly all answers were able to comment on some of the possible symbolism such as dark and light. Some answers were able to comment on form and structure, discussing features such as verse form and enjambment. There was widespread reference to the poem representing a struggle with homosexuality, but some candidates wrestled with Spender's nuance and choices of language. One very astute answer kept an open mind and recognised that the 'last thing the poet wants is to make things clear to anyone but himself'.

Question 12

Virginia Woolf: *Mrs Dalloway*

- (a) This question required candidates to compare and contrast Clarissa's relationships with Richard Dalloway and Peter Walsh. This was a popular text, and a range of answers was seen to this question. Knowledge of the stories involved in the relationships tended to be strong, even in basic answers. Woolf's presentation of the relationships encapsulated 'Woolf's typical themes of regret, looking back and the constant battle between self and others', as one candidate suggested. Some attempts were made to compare and contrast but there was little confident analysis of Woolf's style in all but the best answers. Stream of consciousness, indirect free discourse and use of internal and external dialogue were considered with varying levels of security. Symbolism and some language choices also made appearances in answers but were often added onto narrative retellings rather than woven into arguments. The best answers offered erudite explorations of the relationships with relevant and well selected analytical evaluation.
- (b) This question required candidates to analyse the effects of writing in a passage from the novel, considering in what ways it is characteristic of Woolf's narrative methods and concerns. This was a popular question, and most candidates found the extract challenging to navigate, struggling with lack of contextualisation with the wider novel and too much context in terms of Woolf's life. Some answers became lost in Woolf's language and shifting point of view, resorting to narrative retellings of the passage. The best responses focused on not only the language and symbolism, but also what each character is thinking and why. Those who managed to tie the passage together with reference to clocks and time seemed to fare the best here.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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

Key messages

- Structuring answers to present a progression of relevant ideas is key to success. Answers that are too long tend to lack a selective or strategic approach. Planning is essential to this to avoid digression, repetition, circling and assertion.
- Supporting detail is important and must be selected carefully and related to key points. Similarly naming or listing critical terminology is at odds with effective analysis. The text and interpretation must lead the critical theories and evaluation, not vice versa.
- Context is important. This includes knowledge and understanding of the genre of the text and its literary context as well as social, historical and cultural understanding.
- Knowledge and understanding of texts underpin good answers but this must be linked to the question for success.

General comments

A high level of engagement and enjoyment was seen in virtually all responses and most candidates demonstrated thoughtful personal appreciation of the texts they had studied. Some original and thoughtful work was seen. Rubric infringements were less frequently seen this winter, although some candidates are still answering on two novels, two poets or two texts from the same time range to their detriment. It is important to check the specification in good time to avoid rubric infringements when planning to teach. For example, it is not possible to fulfil the rubric by teaching two novels such as *Dracula* and *Mrs Dalloway* or *Persuasion* and *The Handmaid's Tale*.

Knowledge and understanding were impressive in the best answers, and this led to some very accomplished responses. In responses working at the lower levels, points of knowledge and understanding were often confined to matters of narrative or lacked security when writing about key details. It may seem basic but weaker responses often seemed to not know key facts – *The Knight's Tale's* Palamon and Arcite were often confused, e.g., over which god they prayed to; also, Luke and Nick were mixed up in *Handmaid's Tale*. Answers that were at least competent displayed the ability to select and use specifics of each text to build relevant arguments with focused support. The depth of candidates' knowledge and understanding underpins confidence in responding to questions and it was very evident to the examining team when candidates held secure knowledge and were able to refer to specific quotations and references with ease and relevance. Some answers given seemed to be preprepared responses to previous questions; it is not helpful to use this approach.

Some excellent and very relevant references to context were seen in better answers, but some responses used aspects of context that were either inaccurate, e.g., 'Dickens was an Elizabethan' or irrelevant. Analysis was varied and the best answers demonstrated an ability to engage with details and use analytical approaches to build purposeful and effective arguments relevant to the question. Where candidates had thought about the use of form, structure and language in specific moments or episodes of the text, relevant, insightful and detailed arguments were made. Critical terminology and reference to techniques must be linked to detail; it is not helpful to list a range of techniques to be used in introductions to essays, or to refer to techniques in general terms, e.g., 'the writer uses metaphors to paint a picture' with no supporting example or reference. Name-dropping techniques without contextualising them is to be avoided. In **(a)** questions it is essential that candidates include relevant quotations and specific references. Some answers offered no details from the texts, leading to generalisation and lack of focus. Successful responses to **(a)** questions make consistent reference to form, structure and language throughout, with points supported by appropriate quotation or reference. Many **(a)** answers in this series featured no quotations at all and sometimes reference to analytical matters was confined to lists of techniques. The best analysis is seamlessly interwoven into strategically planned arguments, using interpretation of technical aspects to build

and inform original and perceptive discussions. In **(b)** answers it is expected that candidates will select and analyse details of the given passage or poem with further illustration from the wider text. Some answers reflected only a passing familiarity with the passage that was printed and offered general and insubstantial responses. The extracts and poems chosen are designed to illustrate aspects of each writer's interests, style and literary concerns and these should be acknowledged and used. A line-by-line approach is to be avoided; better answers clearly select from the extract to create a strategic argument. It can be beneficial for candidates to contextualise a **(b)** passage in terms of the text itself, in order to establish why the passage is a crucial turning point in the development of plot, character or theme.

The most effective personal readings come from insight into, and interpretation of the details of a text. Engagement with a text at a personal level is important in forming a focused argument at this level of study and can be linked to the 'other interpretations' aspect of the mark scheme. The evaluation of different opinions and interpretations, Assessment Objective 5, is an important objective on this paper. Some answers still bear no evidence of engagement with other opinions thereby compromising achievement. At A level, candidates should be able to consider different interpretations and ideas in relation to the texts they have studied. Where this element is done well, candidates build relevant and rigorous explorations of the opinions of others and explain whether these views support or challenge their own interpretation of text. At the lower levels of achievement, some candidates simply quote a critic with little discussion of the impact of their view. Critical views are welcome but must be used to develop candidates' own arguments. Theoretical approaches can work well but cannot be shoehorned into answers and must form part of the whole discussion. References to feminist and Marxist readings were seen, particularly in relation to *The Handmaid's Tale* and Emily Dickinson's poetry. A note of caution in terms of these theories is to be sounded as, while it is possible to explore, for example, a feminist reading of *The Knight's Tale*, it is not helpful to refer to Chaucer as a feminist writer. It is of course possible to allude to other interpretations by suggesting their existence, e.g., 'The writer may be suggesting x, but some might think they mean y' but the best answers engage specific views put forward by others and interrogate these in line with their own opinions.

Organisation of responses is vital to clear communication and a plan, regardless of its form, is essential to a strong answer on this paper. Without a strategic view, some answers stray from the question, lose cohesion of argument or become simply narrative retellings of the plot. Overly long answers often reflect a lack of planning and strategic approach. The best answers are coherent, seamless and focused with concise and clear communication of views. Some work we see reflects eloquent, erudite writing with lexically dense and concise analysis and discussion. Clarity is essential and candidates should be reminded that a few minutes proofreading and editing their work is more beneficial than cramming in another side of writing which may not add to the central argument.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Pre-1900 Poetry and Prose

Question 1

Jane Austen: *Persuasion*

- (a)** This question required candidates to compare and contrast the roles and characterisation of Mrs Clay and Mrs Smith. There were insufficient answers to this question to comment on the performance of candidates.
- (b)** This question required candidates to discuss a passage from Volume 2 Chapter 1 showing what it adds to Austen's presentation of Anne Elliot. There were insufficient answers to this question to comment on the performance of candidates.

Question 2

Geoffrey Chaucer: *The Knight's Tale*

- (a)** This question required candidates to explore Chaucer's presentation of honour in the poem. There were very few answers to this question, and these tended to retell the story of the love triangle. There was some evidence of confusion over which God Palamon and Arcite actually prayed to or where the cousins had been imprisoned (Thebes, France and London were suggested). A couple of answers made brief mention of Theseus and helping the Theban widows.

- (b) This question required candidates to analyse an extract from the poem showing what it adds to Chaucer's presentation of the relationship between Palamon and Arcite. There were very few answers to this question, and these tended to track through the passage with varying levels of secure understanding. Some attempts were made to select supporting detail, but quotations used tended to be overlong and only partially dealt with in terms of analysis. There was little reference to the wider poem.

Question 3

Charles Dickens: *Oliver Twist*

- (a) This question required candidates to discuss some of the effects created by Dickens's presentation of relationships between men and women in the novel. There were insufficient answers to this question to comment on the performance of candidates.
- (b) This question required candidates to analyse a passage from Chapter 7, showing what it adds to Dickens's presentation of Oliver. This question attracted several answers. Most took a straightforward approach, tracking through the passage. There was some knowledge and understanding of Oliver's situation and the wider context of the novel. Some understood the pathos in the extract, offering personal responses with some insight. For some, the focus on Oliver led to some narrative discussions of the character's experiences in the wider novel. Little specific analysis of Dickens's style was seen, but a couple of answers referred to use of pathetic fallacy and narrative structure.

Question 4

Emily Dickinson: Selected Poems

- (a) This question required candidates to discuss ways in which Dickinson presents longing in her poetry. This was a popular text, and a fair number of responses was seen. Some candidates would have preferred a question on nature and tried to angle their responses in this direction with limited success. The best responses took longing in a broad sense and offered insightful interpretations of the ways Dickinson reaches for the numinous and ineffable in her poetry. This question gave the best candidates an opportunity to explore the full range of Dickinson's meanings and, where they remained anchored in the texts, responses were strong with seamless application of analytical techniques and interpretations.
- (b) This question required candidates to analyse the poem *I have never seen "Volcanoes"*. There were many answers to this question and candidates were often able to make useful links to other poems such as *A Still - Volcano - life* in terms of the implied meaning of emotion. Effective links to context were made, including expectations of women and Dickinson's relationships with publishers and critics as well as her personal relationships. Knowledge was often sound and there was also secure understanding of the 'hidden meaning of how quiet people might be ready to explode' as one answer suggested. The 'extended metaphor of emotional and creative repression' as one excellent answer put it, was often at least noted and enabled even weaker answers to apply some analysis of Dickinson's style. Having said this, there were a good deal of misreading of details such as the 'phlegmatic mountains' relating to coughing up phlegm, and the reference to 'Bear within' relating to a real bear.

Question 5

John Milton: *Paradise Lost, Books IX and X*

- (a) This question required candidates to discuss some of the ways Milton presents temptation in *Books IX and X*. There were a few responses to this question, and most were strong responses, focusing on relevant details about Adam and Eve. The relevance and security of context varied with some comment on Victorian attitudes to pleasure and treatment of women as well as discussion relating to feminist perspectives.
- (b) This question required candidates to discuss an extract from *Book X*. There were insufficient answers to this question to comment on the performance of candidates.

Question 6

Bram Stoker: *Dracula*

- (a) This question required candidates to discuss some of the ways Stoker shapes a reader's response to Count Dracula in the novel. There were a few answers to this question. Largely these were good in terms of knowledge, understanding and analysis. Some candidates focused too strongly on the idea of the perverse and how Dracula represented the fears of society of the time.
- (b) This question required candidates to analyse a passage from Chapter 19. There were insufficient answers to this question to comment on the performance of candidates.

Section B: Post-1900 Poetry and Prose

Question 7

Margaret Atwood: *The Handmaid's Tale*

- (a) This question required candidates to write about Atwood's use of ceremonies in the novel. Many answers were seen, and the majority were excellent demonstrating comprehensive knowledge and engaged understanding of the Ceremony with the Commander and the Birthing Ceremony with Janine. There were also strong references to the Particution and confident engagement with matters of context and alternative interpretations. Analysis was effective and explored aspects such as use of the unreliable narrator e.g., 'the cinematic descriptions as Atwood watches herself being raped' and references to use of language.
- (b) This question required candidates to analyse the effects of the writing in a passage from Chapter 37 of the novel. There were a great many answers to this question and the full range of achievement was seen. The best responses offered incisive commentary on a range of issues in the passage such as the male gaze, Offred's false consciousness, pornography, female freedom and male hypocrisy. Strong analysis of ways in which power is deployed in Gilead was common throughout the best answers. Many very good responses worked the passage into a wider discussion of the role of women in Gilead and pre-Gilead. Even very straightforward responses demonstrated clear understanding of the passage. Weaker answers simply paraphrased events in the passage and provided a good deal of narrative background with some offering a little context.

Question 8

Sujata Bhatt: Selected Poems from *Point No Point*

- (a) This question required candidates to discuss some of the ways Bhatt presents the connection between past and present in her poems. There were insufficient answers to this question to comment on the performance of candidates.
- (b) This question required candidates to write a critical appreciation of *The Peacock*. There were a few answers to this question. Those seen demonstrated clear understanding of the poem and were able to comment on some of the poetic techniques used including Bhatt's descriptive use of language and vivid imagery. Few candidates broadened their discussion beyond the given poem but there was some reference to context and other interpretations. Candidates seemed unaware that the peacock is the national symbol of India.

Question 9

Jackie Kay: Selected Poems from *Darling*

- (a) This question required candidates to explore how Kay presents thoughts about gender in her poems. There were insufficient answers to this question to comment on the performance of candidates.
- (b) This question required candidates to write a critical appreciation of *Darling* considering ways in which Kay presents grief. There were very few answers to this question. Weaker responses tended to track the poem with paraphrase of what is happening in the poem. One stronger answer referred to Kay's use of quatrains as 'reflecting the structure of grief's heavy progress'.

Question 10

Barbara Kingsolver: *The Poisonwood Bible*

- (a) This question required candidates to compare and contrast Kingsolver's presentation of the relationship between Orleanna and Reverend Price with the relationship between Leah and Anatole. There were insufficient answers to this question to comment on the performance of candidates.
- (b) This question required candidates to analyse the effects of the writing in a passage from Book 5, Exodus. There were insufficient answers to this question to comment on the performance of candidates.

Question 11

Stephen Spender: Selected Poems

- (a) This question required candidates to discuss how Spender reflects on different kinds of love in his poetry. There were insufficient answers to this question to comment on the performance of candidates.
- (b) This question required candidates to analyse *War Photograph*, considering in what ways it is characteristic of Spender's poetic methods and concerns. There were a few responses to this question that explored ideas about time and war. Understanding of the poem was secure and candidates attempted analysis of features such as the tercet verse structure and imagery of 'its metal fang planned for my heart'. Some proficient responses sensitively analysed imagery and anti-war sentiment. The best answers provided detailed deconstruction of poetic methods with some interesting reflections on the poem's title. More straightforward responses were limited to more general, less focused understanding.

Virginia Woolf: *Mrs Dalloway*

Question 12

- (a) This question required candidates to write about Woolf's presentation of Septimus's madness. There were insufficient answers to this question to comment on the performance of candidates.
- (b) This question required candidates to analyse the effects of the writing in a passage from the novel, considering in what ways it adds to their understanding of Woolf's characterisation of Clarissa. There were insufficient answers to this question to comment on the performance of candidates.