

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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

Key messages

1. Learners answering poetry passage questions are advised to offer an overview of the set poem as a framework for their intended analytical points.
2. Learners should plan their essays with a clear structure which enables them to keep their response focused on the question.

General comments

The large majority of learners this session showed at least a sound knowledge of the set texts. There were only a very few rubric errors with learners not understanding the optionality on the paper. Centres are reminded to ensure that all learners know what is expected of them before they sit the exam. Very few responses showed evidence of mismanagement of time in this session. The quality of expression was sound in nearly every case, although there were some candidates with expressive weaknesses which can impede communication at this level.

There were responses to nearly all of the texts on the paper and answers reflecting a wide range of performance were seen on each of the texts attempted by the learners, with the most popular choices being Tennessee Williams's *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* in **Section A: Drama**, the selection of poems from *Songs of Ourselves, Volume 2* in **Section B: Poetry** and Ian McEwan's *Atonement* in **Section C: Prose**.

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

1. Some learners choosing the **(b)** passage question on one of the poetry texts in **Section B** introduce their essays by listing some specific points of poetic analysis which they have spotted in the set poem. Typically, this list will include such specific elements as assonance, caesura and end-stopped lines. The essay then provides examples of and a brief commentary on these poetic methods but does not consider the effects of these methods on the meaning of the poem as a whole, limiting the overall interpretation in the essay. More successful essays will often offer an overview of how the learner interprets the poem with particular notice taken of the precise wording of the question. This enables them to develop any analysis as a support to their interpretation and as part of a structured response to the question, rather than as a series of disconnected points about the style.
2. In the 9695 syllabus, **Assessment Objective 4 Communication** states that learners should 'communicate a relevant, structured and supported response'. Many essays, especially but not only those in the lower levels of assessment, would improve their overall success by having a clearer direction by which the learner's response to the question is developed to a clear conclusion. This should always include an introduction, which sets out the learner's approach to the given task, followed by a series of interlinked and developing paragraphs, culminating in an appropriate summative concluding paragraph. Such a framework would add a useful sense of direction to essays which otherwise can become repetitive and unfocused.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Drama

Question 1

ERROL JOHN: *Moon on a Rainbow Shawl*

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

Question 2

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Measure for Measure*

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

- (a)** This was a minority choice. Nearly every answer selected relevant material with which to address the task, though only the most successful responses were able to shape their essays to the given quotation. Weaker answers retold the Duke's part in the play, often with at least a basic knowledge of the text. Better answers at this level were aware of Shakespeare's dramatic methods, at least implicitly, with many learners recognising the ambivalence of the Duke's presentation. Some learners found his character 'weak and untrustworthy', noting, for example, his manipulation of Isabella and Mariana, whereas other learners had a more positive view of his 'desire to put right the wrongs of the state.' Those essays that did take account of the given quotation, especially when due weight was given to its source, Lucio, often did well, recognising the 'appropriateness of the comment, given how often the Duke is sneaking around in disguise or even openly eavesdropping on private conversations', as one argued. Learners who were able to explore the dramatic action and language with supporting quotations did very well.
- (b)** This was a popular choice, and most responses were able to place the passage into its context appropriately, though some weaker answers did spend too much time in giving the background of the Duke's absence and Claudio's crime, for example, with a consequent loss of focus on the passage itself. Basic and sound answers were able to discuss Angelo's character and role, with some awareness of the significance of the revelations here as 'he attempts to persuade Isabella into committing fornication', as one answer noted. More competent answers noted some of the dramatic methods: Shakespeare's use of soliloquy and its effects, the contrasting language of Angelo alone and when speaking to Isabella, the use of 'loaded language, such as "pleasure"', and the dramatic tension created by 'Angelo's cunning approach' were all popular discussion points. Good answers developed such arguments by close analysis of the details of the passage, whilst simultaneously considering the wider text, often in terms of characterisation and plot. Where such essays were developed with appropriate reference to wider contexts, as well as specific moments in the play as a whole, the essays did very well.

Question 3

JOHN WEBSTER: *The Duchess of Malfi*

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

Question 4

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

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

- (a)** Nearly every response had at least a basic knowledge of the text from which to select relevant material to answer the question. Weaker answers tended to summarise the relationship between Brick and Big Daddy often in detail, though at least implicitly assuming that Brick 'was a homosexual and his father accepted it in him', as one summarised it. Basic answers were aware of the way that the relationship develops during the play, noting, for example, that it is to 'Big Daddy

that Brick reveals the truth of his situation with Skipper and Maggie', with other answers noting how 'Big Daddy, so brusque and mean to the rest of the family, is honest and sensitive when talking to Brick.' More competent answers developed such ideas into considering the relationship more dramatically and how it 'contrasts with other relationships', as one learner suggested, 'especially Gooper and his father.' Sound answers noted the similarities between them, often contrasting their respective marriages and their attitudes to the 'corrupt, mendacious world in which they live', as one essay summarised it. Better answers developed such arguments by close reference to the text, quoting the repeated 'Wouldn't it be funny if that was true?', for example. Good answers also noted the importance of the relationship to the plot, both the 'conflict over the inheritance in the family', and the 'revelation of truth' often discussed to telling effect. Essays that supported these points with appropriate quotation and some awareness of Williams's methods of characterisation did well, particularly where the dramatic nature of many of their exchanges was also explored. The most successful answers were able to synthesise all of these approaches into a coherent and cogent argument, which, in the very best essays, showed a perceptive appreciation of appropriate contexts and how 'Williams turned them into gripping drama', as one essay suggested.

- (b) Every response was aware of the significance of this passage to the play as a whole and had relevant opinions about the family to offer. Weaker answers retold the events up to this point in the play, with a consequent lack of focus on the passage. Other basic answers considered the news of Big Daddy's cancer to Big Mama as 'the source of all of the tension as she lashes out at those around', as one learner argued. The various characters were considered in terms of their own tensions with mention often made of the sibling rivalry, the aggression between Mae and Maggie, the importance of the inheritance, and Brick's alcoholism. More competent answers developed such points by close reference to the passage, often discussing Williams's methods of characterisation soundly. Other essays at this level were aware of Williams's methods, particularly language and stage directions, and how he 'uses them to reveal the true nature of Big Mama's feelings for Big Daddy, particularly in contrast to the unfeeling responses of her family around her', as one essay summarised it. Good answers noted other important details such as the role of Dr Baugh 'as the voice of medical reason and outside the family tensions', though some contrasted his concern with Brick's 'apparent indifference and inappropriate humming', as one essay noted. Confident responses developed the analysis of the tensions, with a clear focus on the dramatic nature of the scene but also on its 'dramatic significance to the play', with 'such asides as "my only son" inspiring Gooper to go to his next option via the briefcase', as one learner suggested. Very good answers saw the full range of tensions and analysed their significance with detailed reference to the passage, secure awareness of Williams's methods, appropriate points from the wider text and, in the most successful responses, more general contexts such as the 'American Dream'.

Section B: Poetry

Question 5

MAYA ANGELOU: *And Still I Rise*

This was the second most popular poetry text, with the vast majority of learners choosing the (b) passage question.

- (a) There were not enough responses to this question to be able to make a general comment on performance.
- (b) This was the second most popular poetry question, with most learners showing at least a basic knowledge and understanding of the meaning of the poem. Some very weak answers struggled to develop their reference to Angelou's concerns, suggesting the poem was being treated as an unseen, limiting their essays in terms of context and content. Better answers at this level had a clear view of the poem, often summarising its meaning in detail and offering general comments about the speaker's feelings, though with only an implicit sense of Angelou's methods of presentation. More competent responses explored the 'range of things that the speaker is not afraid of', with some analysing both 'the nature of the "threats" and the personality of the speaker', as one learner summarised it. Other sound answers considered the 'age of speaker, with many of the frightening things seeming to be childish', as one essay interpreted it. There was also awareness of Angelou's methods at this level of performance, particularly language, symbols and the 'nursery rhyme like rhymes and structure', as one response suggested. More confident responses considered the effects of the poetic voice, the inconsistent rhythm and the occasional more adult threats, with some suggesting the 'anxieties of childhood outlined here have leached into the adult whose fears

are not as controlled as the speaker would make it seem', as one essay perceptively argued. More successful answers linked this poem into the wider selection effectively and often made appropriate contextual points, which were effective when integrated well into the discussions.

Question 6

SIMON ARMITAGE: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

This was the most popular text in the poetry section with a range of answers seen on both options.

- (a) Most learners were able to select relevant material with which to address the task. Basic answers tended to take each of the main characters in the poem in turn, considering 'whether they had honour or not', as one learner expressed it. At this level, there were detailed accounts given of the two meetings between Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, with some implicit awareness of how honour was or was not revealed. More successful answers noted how 'the Green Knight in Arthur's court is boastful and arrogant but in the chapel is much more like an honourable knight', according to one candidate. Competent answers often had contextual points about knightly honour on which to base their essays, enabling them to select material from across the entire poem, often showing secure knowledge and understanding. Characters were still the main focus at this level, but there was often some awareness of Armitage 'shaping the reader's attitude by what they said and did.' As this approach became more analytical, considering language and imagery, for example, as well as symbols and contrasting settings, so the answers became more confident and developed. Good answers always had a secure knowledge of the details of the text and were able to support their points with apposite quotations or direct references to the text. Very good answers were well prepared with the contextual points about honour as a chivalric concept and some essays offered perceptive interpretations of how Armitage develops and even subverts conventional attitudes to honour.
- (b) Most learners had at least a basic knowledge of the text and were able to discuss Sir Gawain relevantly. Some weaker answers were unsure of the specific context to the passage – Sir Gawain readying himself to leave Camelot – and, assuming he was in Bertilak's castle, were insecure in their responses. Basic answers, aware of the context, tended to summarise Sir Gawain's previous encounter with the Green Knight, with a consequent loss of focus on the detail of the passage. More competent answers were aware of 'the preceding gloom in Camelot in expectation of him leaving on his doomed mission', as one learner summarised it, and could explore the 'grandeur and brilliance of his preparations', with that in mind. Sound answers considered Armitage's use of symbols, the detailed cataloguing of a knight's armour and the use of 'hyperbole to enhance Sir Gawain's appearance, such as "fabulous", "shining splendidly" and "extravagant silk"', as one learner noted. Better answers also explored Armitage's language choices, his use of alliterative verse and the effects of 'the almost musical rhythms and sounds, designed to show Sir Gawain as the best of knights', as one learner argued. Better answers developed such points into considering, for example, how the presentation of the horse is 'designed to further elevate Sir Gawain', with others noting the significance of religion and 'his loyalty to God and king as significant points in his presentation as a true worthy knight', as one learner suggested. Very good answers always supported any analysis of Armitage's methods with quotations from the passage, as well as integrating wider text references and, in some very successful essays, apposite contextual points.

Question 7

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

This was the least popular poetry text in this session, with most learners choosing the passage (b) option.

- (a) There were not enough responses to this question to be able to make a general comment on performance.
- (b) Very weak answers appeared to be responding to an unseen, with only a generalised knowledge of the poem and its context and therefore struggling to develop an appreciation of Blake's concerns. Basic answers tended to summarise the poem as a general criticism of the city and the industrial revolution, with too little focus on the details of the poem. Other answers at this level offered a line-by-line paraphrase, though were unable to develop an argument about Blake's view of the city, beyond generalisations, with occasional reference to literary features such as 'caesura' and 'imagery'. More competent answers did focus on the presentation, considering Blake's poetic

methods closely. Language and imagery were often well discussed at this level, with learners offering engaged responses to the 'misery for every inhabitant that Blake reveals in his choices', with some highlighting the 'youthful harlot, the blood of the soldier and the "blackning Church" as potent symbols of the stark reality of life in London', as one learner argued. Confident answers analysed every line for its poetic impact, often linking ideas to the wider text as well as integrating appropriate contextual references. In very good answers, the full range of poetic methods was explored, particularly Blake's use of rhyme and the apparently 'simple verse structure which suggests a simple ballad but here emphasizes the innocence of the people, overwhelmed by the misery of their lives', according to one learner. The use of the first-person narrator – 'perhaps Blake himself' – was identified as 'giving the poem a documentary-like authenticity', as one learner noted. Very good answers supported such points with specific analysis and were always alive to the effects of Blake's choices on the reader.

Question 8

Songs of Ourselves, Volume 2

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

- (a)** There were not enough responses to this question to be able to make a general comment on performance.
- (b)** Weaker answers were often insecure in knowledge and understanding of the poem's meaning, suggesting they were approaching the poem as an unseen. Basic answers tended to summarise the poem in their own words, only implicitly considering how Nancy Fotheringham Cato presents the journey. Other basic answers did look at some poetic methods, often listing them in the opening to the essay, with common choices being alliteration, caesura and 'end-stopped lines'. The comments on these aspects were rarely linked to an overview of the poem itself or the learner's response to the poem as a whole, so that the essays remained a series of unconnected observations about the poem. More successful answers tended to offer a view of the poem in the introduction, providing a basic structure for the learner's response and an interpretative basis for the consideration of Cato's poetic choices. More competent responses looked closely at the language and the imagery, with many noting the use of 'words associated with speed giving the poem an urgent, almost breathless tone', as one learner noted. Sound responses also considered Cato's use of verse form and especially rhythm, with more successful answers considering the effects of these choices. Essays which supported such analyses with close reference to the text often did very well. Very good responses offered more engaged interpretations, with some seeing the poem 'as an allegory for her life generally', which one learner suggested was 'doomed like Icarus as she reached the sun.' The effect of the first-person narrator was well explored at this level, with most learners assuming the speaker was a 'traveller of some kind', though other learners thought the poem 'was about the road itself, as Cato personifies its experience.' Interpretations that were rooted in an analysis of the details of the poem and considered the effects of Cato's choices did very well.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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

Key messages

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General comments

The large majority of learners this session showed at least a sound knowledge of the set texts. There were only a very few rubric errors with learners not understanding the optionality on the paper. Centres are reminded to ensure that all learners know what is expected of them before they sit the exam. Very few responses showed evidence of mismanagement of time in this session. The quality of expression was sound in nearly every case, although there were some candidates with expressive weaknesses which can impede communication at this level.

There were responses to nearly all of the texts on the paper and answers reflecting a wide range of performance were seen on each of the texts attempted by the learners, with the most popular choices being Tennessee Williams's *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* in **Section A: Drama**, the selection of poems from *Songs of Ourselves, Volume 2* in **Section B: Poetry** and Ian McEwan's *Atonement* in **Section C: Prose**.

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

1. Some learners choosing the **(b)** passage question on one of the poetry texts in **Section B** introduce their essays by listing some specific points of poetic analysis which they have spotted in the set poem. Typically, this list will include such specific elements as assonance, caesura and end-stopped lines. The essay then provides examples of and a brief commentary on these poetic methods but does not consider the effects of these methods on the meaning of the poem as a whole, limiting the overall interpretation in the essay. More successful essays will often offer an overview of how the learner interprets the poem with particular notice taken of the precise wording of the question. This enables them to develop any analysis as a support to their interpretation and as part of a structured response to the question, rather than as a series of disconnected points about the style.
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Comments on specific questions

Section A: Drama

Question 1

ERROL JOHN: *Moon on a Rainbow Shawl*

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

Question 2

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Measure for Measure*

This was a popular choice of text, chosen by over one third of the entry, with most learners opting for the **(a)** essay option.

- (a)** Nearly every learner was able to select material with which to address the task. Weaker answers tended to narrate the crimes of some of the characters and how they were punished in the play, often showing detailed, if basic, knowledge of the text. Better answers were able to evaluate the severity of both crime and punishment, often contrasting the treatment of Angelo, Claudio and Lucio. Responses were more successful as they recognised such contrasts as part of Shakespeare's dramatic methods. More competent answers were often wider ranging within the text, so that, for example, the treatment of Barnadine and Mistress Overdone were 'considered in the light of the general forgiveness and reconciliations at the end of the play', as one learner suggested. More successful answers also explored how Shakespeare presents the idea of a 'crime' and who has the 'moral authority to judge anyone else at all', as one learner argued. Shakespeare's presentation of abstract ideas such as mercy and justice were often discussed in responses at this level, though the most successful answers were well aware of 'the dramatic effects created by the contrasting fortunes of say Angelo and Claudio', as one essay noted. Very good answers often integrated contextual points tellingly, ranging from attitudes to sexual behaviour to James 1st and his courtiers. Other very good responses discussed how Shakespeare uses comedy, from such as Lucio and Pompey, to undercut the serious nature of, for example, Claudio's position. This led to some interesting discussions about the Duke and his role in the play, with some seeing his 'earlier leniency as the fundamental cause of the problems Angelo is trying to deal with', though others found his 'meddling with and manipulation of Isabella in particular disturbing if dramatically riveting', as one good essay argued. Where such points were supported by apposite quotations the essays invariably did very well.
- (b)** Most learners recognised these scenes as coming immediately before the Duke's public return to Vienna. Weaker answers either summarised what happened in each scene with little regard to the context or recounted in detail the Duke's 'disappearance' and subsequent secret involvement in the events to this point in the play. Basic answers considered the characters and the significance of what they said, noting that 'we get a look at what each of the main characters is thinking at this point in the play', as one essay put it. Angelo was often the main focus, his panicked 'hope' that the Duke might have gone mad, followed by his revealing soliloquy, offering great scope for considering Shakespeare's characterisation. Better answers contrasted his tone with that of Escalus, whose 'balanced remarks exaggerate the guilty desperation of Angelo's', as one learner suggested. The brief glimpse at the Duke resuming command and taking control was often only touched on, though better answers did highlight the contrast with Angelo's anxiety, as well as 'his manipulation of his courtiers to the exclusion of Angelo and even Escalus', as one learner noted. More attention was given to Isabella and Mariana, their relationship and Isabella's 'evident nervousness', with a few learners noting that 'Friar Peter has taken over the Duke's previous role, dodging between the characters, organising and encouraging', according to one candidate. Good answers explored the dramatic methods in detail, often noticing the tone and language, as well as the 'sense of bustle and excitement created by Shakespeare's gathering the protagonists together before the big final showdown', as one essay argued. Very good answers integrated such close analysis into a more expansive view of the play and Shakespeare's concerns, often with supporting quotation and a sense of the wider contexts.

Question 3

JOHN WEBSTER: *The Duchess of Malfi*

This was not a popular text in the drama section, with learners generally choosing the **(a)** essay option.

- (a)** Every response was able to find relevant material from the play with which to discuss the Duchess. Weaker answers summarised what happened to her, often in detail, with better answers at this level selecting some key events to focus on. Popular choices were her proposal to Antonio, her subsequent marriage to him, her discussions with her brothers and her death scene, with more competent answers noting how Webster uses such dramatic moments to 'reveal different aspects of her character', as one essay suggested. Better answers explored these contrasting aspects more analytically and were often able to find apposite quotations to support their arguments. Other good answers were alive to the dramatic qualities of, for example, her death scene, noting how Webster 'contrasts the violence and horror of Bosola and his actions with her dignity and elegance', though others argued that she is 'rash and foolish in her words and actions, especially when Webster puts her against her corrupt and manipulative brothers', as one noted. Good answers developed arguments around a range of contrasts: political violence and domestic harmony, purity and corruption, youthful optimism and experienced cynicism were popular and rewarding choices. Very good answers particularly focused on Webster's dramatic methods and how he used them to 'shape' the audience response, with language, imagery and contrasting dramatic moods often well explored, and with carefully chosen specific textual references in support.
- (b)** There were only a handful of responses to this question. Nearly every response was aware of the role of Antonio generally but the other characters in the extract were not clearly identified and discussed. Consequently, the reason why Antonio's property was being given away and the significance of to whom it was eventually given was not considered. Contextualisation tended to be very brief and often generalised. Better answers were able to see how the corruption of the court was being 'contrasted to the honesty of a few good men', as one learner wrote. There was generally some awareness of the 'dangerous course' that Antonio was about to take with the Cardinal, though also some evident confusion as to whether the Duchess was in fact now dead and whether Antonio knew of it. Only a very few responses considered any dramatic methods in detail, often language and contrasting characters and these essays usually were more successful.

Question 4

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

This was the most popular text from **Section A**. Over half of the learners chose this text, with about an even split between the two options.

- (a)** Nearly every response had at least a basic knowledge of the text from which to select relevant material to answer the question. Weaker answers tended to summarise the various relationships, often in detail, though at times with only an implicit recognition of the conflict between the characters. Better answers at this level were able to identify and list different kinds of conflict, often with supporting narratives to exemplify the nature of the conflict. Other basic responses distinguished different kinds of conflict within a single relationship, often Brick and Maggie's, though Big Mama and Big Daddy were also popular choices. More competent responses considered ways in which conflict created drama, how 'Williams develops the plot through Maggie and Brick's sexual problems and the siblings' battle for Big Daddy's wealth', as one learner argued. More developed answers explored other conflicts: Big Daddy's battle with cancer, Brick's internal conflicts over his sexuality and Maggie's conflict with her poor background were popular and fruitful points for discussion. The most successful responses concentrated on how Williams presents the various conflicts, such as his methods of characterisation, the setting in Brick and Maggie's bedroom, the use of stage directions and his choice of language. Few learners though were confident in analysing Williams's linguistic choices, though much was made of the play's title and how it 'reflected Maggie's constant state of social and mental conflict', as one learner argued. Very good responses were able to support analytical points with appropriate quotation and reference to the text, with some able to integrate interesting contextual arguments about post-war American cultural attitudes and the role of women in the nuclear family.

- (b) This was the most popular drama question in **Section A** and there were many very good responses. Nearly every response had opinions to offer about Brick and Maggie and their relationship, with some placing these final moments in the context of the wider play. Weaker answers often summarised what had happened to Brick and Maggie in the rest of the play and then speculated on what happened after the curtain has fallen, often showing personal engagement with the dramatic situation. Better answers based their views clearly on what was said, with many noting Brick's echo of Big Daddy's words to Big Mama, though opinion was evenly split as to whether this was a positive or negative hint offered by Williams about his two main characters. More competent answers tended to recognise the 'unresolved nature of the ending', as one learner put it. There were good arguments made for Maggie being successful in her seduction, though other learners saw Brick as beyond her now he 'had found his click and had nothing to say', as one suggested. Maggie's domination in this scene was well explored, with some good analyses made of her actions as well as her words. Other good responses analysed Williams's use of stage directions carefully. Only a minority of learners considered the impact of Big Mama's brief entrance, though the context to it was generally well explored. Very good answers were able to find an effective balance between detailed analysis of specific moments in the passage and reference to the wider text. Answers at this level were always aware of the 'audience' as well as offering a personal response, and there was a wide range of possible interpretations seen, with the best arguments supported by detailed analysis of the passage, as well as thoughtful references to the wider text.

Section B: Poetry

Question 5

MAYA ANGELOU: *And Still I Rise*

This was a minority choice of text in the poetry section with most learners choosing the option (b) passage question.

- (a) There were only a few answers offered to this question. Most learners were able to choose relevant poems on which to base their responses. Popular choices were *Phenomenal Woman*, *Where We Belong*, *A Duet* and *Still I Rise*. Weaker answers summarised their selected poems, often with only basic knowledge and understanding, forcing a few to use the set poem from the passage question. Other weak answers did show how Angelou talked about women in her poems but did not consider either her presentation of the personas or their experiences. Competent answers selected wisely, choosing poems which offered contrasting experiences and attitudes, with some sound discussions comparing, for example, 'the positive attitudes in *Phenomenal Woman* with the violence and conflict of *A Kind of Love, Some Say*', as one essay suggested. Other sound answers discussed how Angelou contrasted youth and age, women abused with women in control of their destinies as well as women's experiences with and in contrast to men's. Overall, there were only a very few learners who could confidently explore Angelou's poetic choices, but those who did and could support their points with appropriate quotation did well.
- (b) This was a relatively popular poetry question, with most learners showing at least a basic knowledge and understanding of the meaning of the poem. Some very weak answers were insecure in their knowledge, suggesting the poem was being treated as an unseen, leading to limited responses, particularly in terms of meaning and understanding. Better answers at this level had a clearer view of the poem, 'as if the speaker is writing a letter to her lover', as one suggested. Others could identify 'the different ways the speaker looks at time and place, as a way of explaining the depth of their love', as one learner argued, though some contrasting responses thought the 'speaker desperate, perhaps with some terrible illness'. More competent responses focused on Angelou's methods, often exploring her use of 'the language of love, starting with an endearment', as one learner noticed. The short phrases, the soft sounds and the gentle tone were well analysed in more successful answers, though only very good responses could link this poem to her presentation of relationships elsewhere in the selection. Where such references were linked to specific moments in the given poem with appropriate quotation and some recognition of the wider contexts, the responses did very well.

Question 6

SIMON ARMITAGE: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

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

- (a) There were not enough responses to this question to be able to make a general comment on performance.
- (b) Nearly every learner was able to place this passage in its appropriate context, immediately before the entrance of the Green Knight. Weaker answers spent too much time in providing the background context of the passage, often summarising the whole poem. Better answers at this level did focus on the passage and King Arthur, offering relevant opinions on Arthur's character and behaviour, as well as their view of his court. Sounder responses saw how Armitage's description created 'a picture of harmony and comfort, with Arthur in control', all of which 'was to be shattered when the Green Knight appears', as one learner argued. More confident answers developed such arguments by looking closely at Armitage's choices, particularly language and imagery, and their effects on the reader's response to Arthur himself. The presentation of the feast was often contrasted with the feasts in Lord Bertilak's castle, with most learners thinking the 'restraint and decorum of Arthur's court suggested its superiority', as one essay explained. More successful answers were able to integrate such wider text references into their analysis of the set passage. However, only a very few responses could confidently explore Armitage's alliterative verse and its effects. Those essays that did, with appropriate quotation from both passage and wider text, did very well.

Question 7

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

This was the second most popular poetry text in this session, with most the learners who chose the text opting for the passage **Question (b)**

- (a) Nearly every learner was able to select relevant poems on which to base their response. Popular choices were *Holy Thursday*, *The Lamb*, *The Shepherd*, *The Chimney Sweeper*, *The Tyger* and *London*. Basic responses summarised their chosen poems and explained what they showed about religion at the time Blake was writing. Better answers at least implicitly considered how he 'portrays religion through the people and what they do, and do not do, for the poor and needy', as one learner summarised it. More competent answers chose contrasting poems which enabled them to develop their arguments and to explore more of Blake's range and scope in his portrayal of religion. Those who considered his poetic methods often focused on language and tone, contrasting, for example, 'the gently idyllic language and effects of *The Shepherd*,' with the 'harsh desperation of the lives depicted in *London* or *The Chimney Sweeper*,' as one essay argued. More successful answers were able to discriminate between, for example, Blake's portrayal of some religious figures such as in *Holy Thursday* with how the poor responded to God and the countryside. Where these answers supported the arguments with apposite quotation and some awareness of the wider context within which Blake was writing, they invariably did very well.
- (b) This was a popular choice and nearly every answer had at least a basic knowledge and understanding of the poem. Weaker answers often attempted a verse-by-verse summary of the poem, with some at least implicit awareness of Blake's choices of language and verse form. These were often considered to be like a 'child's nursery rhyme' or even a 'lullaby', though perhaps ignoring the darker content of the poem. At this level, there was at least some recognition of the wider text and the contrasting poems of innocence and experience. More competent answers developed their responses with this in mind, exploring the contrasting emotions of Lyca and her mother, for example, with some attempting to see the poem as an 'allegory of losing innocence' or 'breaking free of parental influence', despite Lyca having 'told' 'only seven summers'. More successful answers contrasted the presentation of humans and animals, noting how the 'predatory and threatening animals become saviours and protectors to Lyca', as one learner argued. The most successful answers had a secure understanding of the poem on which to base their interpretation and were able to explore Blake's poetic methods with confidence, showing awareness of poetic form and rhythm and their effects. Where such analyses were supported by

pertinent quotations as well as some awareness of the wider text and appropriate contexts, the answers did very well.

Question 8

Songs of Ourselves, Volume 2

This was the most popular poetry text, with over half of the entry choosing it. The vast majority chose the option **(b)** passage question.

- (a)** Nearly all of the few learners who chose this question were able to find relevant poems to discuss. Popular choices were *The Darkling Thrush*, *The Buck in the Snow*, *Eel Tail* and *The Stars Go Over the Lonely Ocean*. More basic responses summarised their chosen poems with only implicit awareness of the ways the poets presented living creatures. Learners who chose contrasting poems were able to cover a wider range of concerns in their essays and tended to be more successful. More competent answers focused on the poetic methods employed by the poets to achieve their effects. Though learners had a sound appreciation of language and imagery, only a few were able to confidently discuss other poetic methods such as rhythm and verse form and these essays were often more successful. Good responses developed the arguments about the presentation of living creatures and the poetic concerns they revealed through detailed reference to the poems and in the most successful answers a secure understanding of the relevant contexts.
- (b)** This was by far the most popular question on the paper. Nearly all learners had at least a basic knowledge and understanding of the poem's meaning and relevant contexts, such as the poet's background or the appropriate economic downturn. A few very weak answers however were less well prepared and approached the poem as unseen, limiting the depth and the development of their interpretations. The title was a secure starting point for many responses, recognising the 'Marxist, anti-capitalism stance of the poet from the start', as one learner suggested. Basic answers retold the story of the brother-in-law in their own words, often with some personal engagement and views 'on the rights and wrongs of his situation', as one suggested. More competent responses saw the brother-in-law as 'an everyman figure, representing hard-workers and their failure to live the American Dream', as one essay noted. Other learners saw him as a victim 'of cold and callous corporate greed', with some developing interesting interpretations of how Ward contrasted 'the human family warmth of simple American activities with the capitalist exploiters of workers generally'. More successful answers looked closely at Ward's poetic choices, the colloquial language, the 'prose-like quality of the verse and the verse-form', and his use of symbols to 'show the success (Harley and steak) and failure (food stamps and bowed head)', as one essay summarised it. Only a minority of learners discussed the final four lines, which was a limitation in exploring the full impact of Ward's presentation. Those essays which were able to integrate a response to these lines into their discussion, along with a clear and accurate sense of appropriate contexts often did very well.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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

Key messages

1. Learners answering poetry passage questions are advised to offer an overview of the set poem as a framework for their intended analytical points.
2. Learners should plan their essays with a clear structure which enables them to keep their response focused on the question.

General comments

The large majority of learners this session showed at least a sound knowledge of the set texts. There were only a very few rubric errors with learners not understanding the optionality on the paper. Centres are reminded to ensure that all learners know what is expected of them before they sit the exam. Very few responses showed evidence of mismanagement of time in this session. The quality of expression was sound in nearly every case, although there were some candidates with expressive weaknesses which can impede communication at this level.

There were responses to nearly all of the texts on the paper and answers reflecting a wide range of performance were seen on each of the texts attempted by the learners, with the most popular choices being Tennessee Williams's *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* in **Section A: Drama**, the selection of poems from *Songs of Ourselves, Volume 2* in **Section B: Poetry** and Ian McEwan's *Atonement* in **Section C: Prose**.

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

1. Some learners choosing the **(b)** passage question on one of the poetry texts in **Section B** introduce their essays by listing some specific points of poetic analysis which they have spotted in the set poem. Typically, this list will include such specific elements as assonance, caesura and end-stopped lines. The essay then provides examples of and a brief commentary on these poetic methods but does not consider the effects of these methods on the meaning of the poem as a whole, limiting the overall interpretation in the essay. More successful essays will often offer an overview of how the learner interprets the poem with particular notice taken of the precise wording of the question. This enables them to develop any analysis as a support to their interpretation and as part of a structured response to the question, rather than as a series of disconnected points about the style.
2. In the 9695 syllabus, **Assessment Objective 4 Communication** states that learners should 'communicate a relevant, structured and supported response'. Many essays, especially but not only those in the lower levels of assessment, would improve their overall success by having a clearer direction by which the learner's response to the question is developed to a clear conclusion. This should always include an introduction, which sets out the learner's approach to the given task, followed by a series of interlinked and developing paragraphs, culminating in an appropriate summative concluding paragraph. Such a framework would add a useful sense of direction to essays which otherwise can become repetitive and unfocused.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Drama

Question 1

ERROL JOHN: *Moon on a Rainbow Shawl*

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

Question 2

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Measure for Measure*

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

- (a)** Nearly every learner selected relevant material from the text with which to address the task. Weaker answers tended to summarise the various sexual relationships in the play, often showing detailed basic knowledge and understanding. Better answers at this level discussed contrasting situations such as Claudio/Juliet and Angelo/Isabella, with an implicit awareness of the dramatic presentation. All learners had relevant opinions and often had personal engagement with 'the clear hypocrisy of the rulers' and how they 'showed little awareness of how their decisions affected the poorer people', as one learner summarised it. More competent responses considered the 'different attitudes', with many noting the contrast between the 'religious figures such as Isabella and Angelo (at least at the start) and the sex workers such as Pompey and Mistress Overdone', as one essay noted. Others explored Shakespeare's use of irony and more rarely comedy as methods by which 'the serious concerns were made more human', as one essay suggested. Where these arguments were supported by direct reference to the play, the essays became increasingly successful. The ambivalent attitudes of the Duke were seen to reflect his general ambiguity in the play, so that learners were divided between seeing him as a 'weak hypocrite when it comes to sex', and a 'merciful leader who understands and accepts people's sinful nature'. Answers which looked closely at Shakespeare's methods of presenting these different attitudes often did very well. Language, again often seen as contrasted between the coldness of Angelo and the bawdiness of Lucio for example, was often well explored, though dramatic action, such as the public shaming of Claudio and Juliet, were also popular discussion points. Essays which used supporting apposite quotations and appropriate relevant contexts always did well and learners generally showed real engagement with the issues, noting that 'the problems of sexual behaviour and attitudes dramatised in the play are still as relevant today as they were 400 years ago'.
- (b)** Nearly every response had some knowledge and understanding of the context to the passage: Isabella pleading for the life of her brother. Weaker answers tended to summarise the background and often the later events following on from this passage, with a consequent loss of focus on the specifics of the task. Basic answers had some knowledge of Angelo's role in the play and often strong opinions about his character and actions. These again distracted some learners from focusing on the particulars of this passage. Sounder answers saw how Shakespeare uses Isabella's words to gradually reveal the changes in Angelo, with some exploring the effects of the asides and his closing soliloquy in detail. Better answers analysed the language closely, often noting the use of religious diction, for example, as well as tracing the development of Angelo's thoughts through words such as 'desire', 'foully', temptation' and 'strumpet'. Good responses were able to explore the development in Angelo, 'his shifting state of mind' as one suggested, through his language and imagery. Other good responses were alive to the dramatic situation, seeing it as 'a sort of court or tribunal', and how Angelo's 'slipping into lust and desire mirrored the very crime that Isabella's brother committed', as one learner argued. Very good answers developed such ideas through analysing the tone and mood, the role of Lucio and 'the shift from the formal courtroom to Angelo's interior deliberations', as one learner put it. Answers which were rooted in the context to the passage and were able to integrate wider text references into details drawn from the passage, often did very well, particularly where appropriate wider contexts were also used to support the arguments offered.

Question 3

JOHN WEBSTER: *The Duchess of Malfi*

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

Question 4

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

This was the most popular text from **Section B**, with over two thirds of the learners choosing it, the majority selecting the passage option **(b)**.

- (a) Nearly all learners had strong opinions about Maggie and her role in the play. Weaker answers tended to summarise her story, particularly with Brick and Skipper, often in detail, but were rarely able to show how her actions shaped the audience's responses to her. Better answers at this level selected what they considered to be the significant relationships and actions in her role. More straightforward answers approached the task by listing her various relationships and commenting on what they revealed about her. For example, 'she is desperate for Brick's attention, sucks up to Big Daddy to get his inheritance and is jealous of Mae and her many children', as one learner suggested. More competent answers considered some of Williams's methods, noting for example how he uses stage directions to 'outline her changing moods and sudden shifts of attack', as one learner put it. Other sound responses developed the relationship approach, exploring 'the contrasts that Williams creates by how she responds to Mae and her children ('no-neck monsters') and Skipper (a rival for Brick's affection)' as one essay argued. More confident answers considered her language and imagery as a 'key method used by Williams to reveal the depth and range of her personality', as one suggested, with some learners noting her humour, her sensitivity to Big Mama and her manipulation of Brick in the closing scenes. Very good answers often had a clear sense of the drama, how 'Williams exposes different facets of her over time, often contrasting her to those around her, so that she is seen as more feminine and seductive, for example, because of her interactions with the 'monster of fertility', Mae', one essay successfully argued. Very good answers always supported such arguments with apposite quotation from the text and had a secure grasp of relevant contexts, such as the role of women in the USA in the 1950s.
- (b) Nearly every learner had relevant opinions about Big Mama around which to structure their response. Weaker answers retold her story throughout the play, often in secure detail, but with too little focus on the passage itself. Better answers were always aware of the context to the extract, Big Daddy's cancer diagnosis, though some learners were confused as to the contents of Gooper's brief case and why Big Mama was upset about it. Basic answers often adopted a line-by-line approach, though this at times meant the final exchange with Brick was either ignored or treated cursorily. More straightforward responses noted her 'mimicking of Big Daddy in words and deeds', which for some showed 'her lack of confidence in her own authority', as one learner put it. Her contrasting responses to Brick and Gooper were often well explored, her 'favouritism for her youngest revealed here as the root cause of Gooper's hostility to the family and particularly Brick', as one essay argued. More competent answers considered Williams's presentation in detail, often discussing the range of her roles here, 'a mother, a wife, an authority figure and above all a protector of the family', as one learner summarised it. Other good answers analysed how she often 'reminisces about happier times, such as Brick as a child, and tries to re-establish harmony in the family'. Successful responses explored Williams's language, her 'shifting tones that reveal her shifting emotions as she comes to terms with death', as one learner argued. Other good answers analysed the stage directions, the dramatic action, particularly Gooper 'tense with sibling rivalry' and her reaction to Maggie's lie about pregnancy. For some learners her acceptance of this was evidence of her gullibility, though for others it showed her 'love of family and desire to have good news to combat the 'black thing' in their lives', as one learner suggested. Where such arguments were supported by quotations from the passage and appropriate reference to the wider text, the answers did very well.

Section B: Poetry

Question 5

MAYA ANGELOU: *And Still I Rise*

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

- (a) Popular choices of poems were *Just for A Time*, *Through the Inner City to the Suburbs*, *Men and My Arkansas*. More basic answers summarised their chosen poems, often in detail, and success was determined by how well the supporting comments were shaped to the task, Angelou's exploration of change. More competent answers often demonstrated sound knowledge of the poems and Angelou's background, integrating contextual points appropriately into the responses. Societal, personal and relationship changes were the most common areas for discussion, with many noting the significance of the changes in attitudes to and acceptance of racial issues during Angelou's lifetime. More successful answers, while maintaining the focus on the key concerns, also analysed how she explored the changes, looking at a range of poetic methods. Angelou's language and use of imagery and rhythm were popular choices, with very successful answers offering developed interpretations of their effects on the reader. Few learners were as confident when discussing poetic form, rhyme and poetic voice, but those that did tackle these methods, and were able to support their arguments with appropriate quotation, did very well.
- (b) This was a popular question, and most learners had interesting and engaged opinions about the poem, and Angelou generally, on which to base their response. Some weak answers found the poetic structure and voice challenging, leading to misinterpretations about 'Job' and 'Father' for example. Nearly every answer recognised how 'the speaker is appealing to God for help', as one suggested. Basic responses saw the speaker as a 'specific person, perhaps Angelou herself, who was having a bad time', as one learner wondered, with some finding biographical references in the detail of the poem. More competent answers had sound knowledge and understanding of the poem's meaning, the 'patience of the speaker set against the unanswering God', as one learner expressed it. More successful responses at this level focused as well on Angelou's poetic methods, particularly language and imagery, with many noting 'the tone of desperation she creates', as one learner suggested. More confident answers recognised the 'universality of the speaker, and the significance of the cry for help, in the context of racial discrimination', as one learner argued. Others noted how the 'lack of heavenly response, united with the misery of the earthly existence, creates the anguish in the overall situation of the oppressed'. Others analysed the effect of the religious language and the implications of the biblical references to Job, the mountains and the rivers. Where these interpretations were supported by some contextual references, whether biographical or textual, the answers often did very well.

Question 6

SIMON ARMITAGE: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

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

- (a) Most learners were able to select relevant material with which to address the task. Some weaker answers offered a general response on chivalry in the poem generally, with only intermittent references to the green knight. More basic answers tended to retell the story of the Green Knight's challenge, the response of Sir Gawain and the reveal about his identity at the end of the poem, with only implicit relevance to the given task. More successful answers at this level did have some opinions on chivalry and how the Green Knight 'challenges Sir Gawain's and the reader's assumptions about what makes a chivalrous knight', as one learner suggested. More competent answers discussed him in relation to Sir Gawain, and less frequently King Arthur, comparing the more 'relaxed and lively atmosphere in Lord Bertilak's castle', to the 'austere and rather stiff court in Camelot'. Other sound responses noted how this was 'noticeable in Sir Gawain himself who becomes more of a man and less of robot under Bertilak's influence'. Better answers were knowledgeable about chivalry and were often able to draw detailed and perceptive comparisons between the two protagonists as 'representatives of two different kinds of chivalry', with some essays contrasting 'Bertilak's old rough pagan Green Knight with the more refined and Christian Sir Gawain', as one learner argued. The most successful essays were able to look at Armitage's poetic

methods in detail, particularly his use of descriptive language and imagery, and explore how the Green Knight is 'presented as a challenge to Sir Gawain's notions and ultimately becomes his teacher', as one learner argued. Essays at this level often had a secure understanding of relevant contexts and were always able to support points with specific reference to the text.

- (b) This question was often answered well. Weaker responses were at times unsure of the context of the passage, with some essays for example assuming this was Sir Gawain returning to Arthur's court in Camelot. Basic answers did realise that he has 'arrived at Lord Bertilak's castle, not realising he is the green knight', though some answers at this level did move away from the passage into retelling the story of the Green Knight more generally. Sounder answers were able to explore the context noting the 'contrast in the castle with the cold wilderness where Gawain was previously lost', as one essay put it. Other sound answers recognised this was 'an exciting and important even for the castle dwellers', with some developing this into exploring how their reaction 'increases the reader's awareness of the importance and reputation of Sir Gawain to the outside world', as one learner argued, 'making him an icon of chivalry and knighthood.' The reaction of the host was often explored in more successful answers, along with some of the descriptive details, such as the listing of exotic foods and the clothes given to Sir Gawain. Successful answers looked closely at the language and were able to find contrasts with the Christmas feast in Camelot, some learners finding Bertilak's castle 'excessive and over-the-top in its incredible generosity', as one noted. Other good answers compared the 'welcome of the Green Knight in Camelot to what happens here', though for some it is the attitude of Sir Gawain 'humble and desperate after his journey compared to the arrogance of the green knight', that made the difference. The most successful answers explored Armitage's methods in detail, especially his use of lists, the language of excess and the subtle hints of the challenges to come, in the 'language of love'. However very few considered Armitage's alliterative verse or the poetic rhythms, beyond mentioning the bob and wheels in the passage. This limited some responses in terms of the analysis offered as it is such a key element of Armitage's presentation.

Question 7

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

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

- (a) There were not enough responses to this question to be able to make a general comment on performance.
- (b) Most learners were able to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the poem's meaning on which to base their response. A few weak answers seemed to be responding to an unseen poem and consequently were unsure of the situation or the appropriate contexts. More basic responses were able to consider the infant and the relationship between the 'mother and child' which some saw 'as a loving and caring one', though others were swayed by the 'weeping mother' into assuming there 'was some tragedy unfolding such as the child being sick or ill', as one learner speculated. More competent answers were able to explore the 'poetic voice of the mother, the image of the angel watching carefully, and the sense of holiness that surrounds them all', as one learner put it. Other sound responses noted the language, especially the repetition of 'sweet' and explored its possible effects. More successful answers were confident in addressing the 'nursery rhyme, almost ballad like verse form', as well as the 'simple, repetitive rhymes and linguistic repetitions, all of which help to create the mood of a nursery and its innocence', as one argued. Good answers were knowledgeable about appropriate contexts, linking this poem to others in the selection which considered childhood and infants. Many discussed Blake's use of symbols, with some perceptive discussions on how 'the symbols of innocence here are in stark contrast to the sinister and dark symbols of the chimney sweep poems', as one learner argued. Very good answers explored such details as Blake's use of pronouns, sleep and religion, though here 'it is both gentle and protecting, compared to *Holy Thursday* and its evil humans destroying innocence', as one argued. Essays at this level often supported their interpretations by detailed and appropriate reference to both the poem and the wider text and were comfortable in exploring the full range of Blake's poetic methods.

Question 8

Songs of Ourselves, Volume 2

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

- (a)** Nearly every learner was able to select two relevant poems with which to address the task and had at least straightforward opinions on the powerful emotions presented in their chosen poems. Popular choices were *Renouncement*, *I hear an Army...*, *Australia 1970*, *an afternoon nap*, *Winter Song* and *In the Park*. Basic responses summarised the two poems, often in detail and with some understanding of the emotions revealed. At this level, the required comparison was implicit rather than overt and success was often determined by how much the learner could consider the presentation of the emotions, as well as explaining them. More competent responses focused at least equally on presentation, with some responses listing various poetic methods in the essay's introduction and then offering comments on the poets' use of those methods. Popular discussion points were language, imagery and tone, though some learners focused more on such poetic details as enjambement, caesuras and 'end-stopped' lines. These essays were generally less successful, as they rarely enabled the learner to show much understanding of the poem as a whole or to explore the poets' concerns in depth. More confident learners were also able to discuss other poetic methods such as rhyme and rhythm, though only a few seemed to be aware of the poetic voice and its effects, despite often referring to 'the speaker'. At this level there was always secure knowledge and understanding of the poems' meanings and the poetic concerns that informed them. The most successful responses had sophisticated views of the two poems, were able to develop the comparison seamlessly throughout the essay and were alive to the nuance of the specific poetic choices that either distinguished or connected the poets' approaches to their poetic concerns. Where such approaches were supported by accurate quotation and appropriate contexts the answers did very well.
- (b)** This was a very popular choice with nearly every response able to offer some opinions on the speaker's attitude to her mother. Weaker answers were often insecure in knowledge and understanding of the basic meaning and concerns of the poem, with some confused interpretations offered and misreadings of the middle section as an actual biography of the mother. Basic responses did have the requisite knowledge and were able to summarise the poet's shifting attitudes to the mother, though with little awareness of the changing tone, for example. Better answers at this level did look at some of the poetic methods, such as language and 'the poetic voice of the grieving child', as one learner suggested. More competent answers developed their interpretations through examining the language and imagery in detail, particularly the opening verses where 'shocking white ambulance' and 'ivy-mother' were often well analysed. The final verses were generally less well dealt with, with Beer's use of generalisations about other poets' use of 'a lost woman' not always clearly grasped. Confident answers could trace the meaning through to the final verse where 'the real identity of the lost woman as the speaker/poet is revealed', as one summarised it. Very good responses were sensitive to the shifting tone of the poem and were able to explore how 'the speaker develops through her relationship with her dead mother from a shocked child to full self-awareness of her mother's true gift to her', as one learner argued. Verse form, voice and the 'intermittent rhyme' were well analysed at this level and the essays often integrated appropriate contexts to support the learners' interpretations and insights.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/21
Prose and Unseen

Key messages

- Responses which rely on summary of the set texts or unseen extracts are not successful.
- Successful responses focus closely on the writing of the texts and how the writer presents the meaning and content to the reader.
- Responding to the passage-based **(b)** questions as unseen material, without knowledge and understanding of the wider text, usually leads to a restricted understanding of the passage.
- It can be useful to place a set text passage in context at the beginning of the essay or give an overview of the candidate's understanding of the unseen passage at the start.
- When responding to a question from **Section B: Unseen**, candidates should carefully read though the text in order to be confident about its meaning before beginning to write their answer.

General comments

The different set texts were well represented in this series, though Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* was less widely covered. All the unseen options proved popular, with a fairly even split between them on each paper. As happened last year, Examiners noted a clear difference between those responses to **(b)** passage questions on the set texts which were based on a knowledge and understanding of the whole text, and those where the candidates had approached the passages as unseen material. The lack of textual knowledge led to serious misunderstanding in many cases and usually led to restricted, generalised answers. On the other hand, candidates who could draw on their wider knowledge of the texts were able to contextualise the extracts and demonstrate understanding of the development or structure of the texts.

Question prompts such as 'presentation' and 'ways in which' are designed to encourage candidates to show their understanding of the writers' choices of form, structure and language and the effects these have on the communication of meaning. Successful essays respond explicitly to these prompts and use specific references and quotations in the **(a)** questions to maintain this focus. In passage-based **(b)** questions, successful essays focus in detail on the extract printed on the question paper in order to analyse the writing closely. Teaching for **Section B: Unseen** should introduce candidates to a wide range of different genres and styles so that they have a good grounding in key features and conventions of poetry, prose and drama.

Question specific comments

Section A: Prose

Question 1

KIRAN DESAI: *The Inheritance of Loss*

- (a)** There were very few answers to the question on the presentation of the Gorkha rebellion, but those candidates who chose it seemed to have done so because they were confident with the material. With knowledge of historical and political context, these often considered the territorial dispute to be the result of British control of India and Indian independence. Answers considered the idealism which fuels a character such as Gyan, but also the way that Desai presents the rebels' actions, ranging from the apparently petty, like the theft of Jemu's obsolete rifles and the consumption of Lola and Noni's food, to indiscriminate violence and bloodshed. Some were able to see how Desai reflects the wider issues of the Gorkha rebellion in microcosm in the relationship between Gyan and Sai.

- (b) There were more responses to the question on the presentation of the library, its books and Sai's responses to them. A number of responses thought the location was London, which demonstrated restricted knowledge of the text. Many others dealt with some of the surface meaning of the passage without closely examining Desai's methods of presentation. More successful essays commented on the fact that the books 'had not been touched in fifty years' to explore the language and imagery of neglect and decay which permeates the first paragraph in particular. Alert candidates also considered the nature of the books in the library, most by English writers, with some of their books written about India. This collection was recognised as the legacy of colonialism and some noted the disapproval expressed about English writers' perceptions of India, by 'Lola, Noni, Sai, and Father Booty', as they give a skewed impression which 'didn't correspond to the truth.' While noting Sai's distaste for books such as *The Raj Quartet*, several candidates also noted her interest in *My Vanishing Tribe*, putting her in contact with indigenous people for the first time, which in turn demonstrates her own ignorance of India and her limited education. Few candidates considered the extract from Hardless' book at the end of the extract, so artfully juxtaposed by Desai with 'Paddington Bear, and Scratchin Patchkin'. In failing to consider this, they also missed the violence of Desai's presentation of her fury at the *Indian Gentleman's Guide to Etiquette* and its implications.

Question 2

IAN McEWAN: *Atonement*

- (a) Most candidates who responded to this question relied on narrative summary. Having established that the reader learns of Robbie's and Cecilia's deaths at the end of the novel, they then turned back to the beginning and recounted the beginning of their relationship, then Robbie's imprisonment and war experience, before arriving once again at their deaths. Some commented that what the reader is told of their deaths at this stage of the novel, from septicaemia and the bombing of Balham underground station, overturns what they had been led to believe. Few considered the offhand way in which Briony delivers this information at the end of the novel and considered her role as narrator and author. Even fewer directly answered the question about the effects on the reader resulting from McEwan's narrative choice. There was little consideration of McEwan's metafiction, or how this revelation might take the reader by surprise, causing a revaluation of the whole novel up to that point, and the reader's previous certainties. Since this is the key moment in the novel where McEwan reveals what kind of book it is, upending the entire text, it was surprising that so few candidates were able fully to respond to the question.
- (b) There was a significant minority of responses which were very restricted in their knowledge of the text and therefore struggled to understand the passage. For example, a number thought that Robbie and Turner were two different characters, while some thought that Robbie was the name of the boy in the passage. A number of other essays, better placed with knowledge, did not 'comment closely' on the writing of the passage but narrated its contents, while recognising that it depicts a violent scene of warfare. More successful responses noted that the third-person narration describes the scene externally, with little access to the thoughts of any character – just a few indications of Robbie's perceptions, memories and pain. Some commented on the way that the sequences of short sentences create a sense of breathless pace as Robbie attempts to help the woman and her child in the face of the aerial attack. The violence and desperation was seen in such words and phrases as 'pulling', 'screaming', 'shoved', 'unbelievable roar', 'the shock wave prised them from the earth', 'stinging spray', 'rippling thuds of machine-gun fire' and so on. There is a range of visual and aural effects in the language which bore fruit for those candidates who considered the examples. Some candidates also considered the way McEwan creates pathos for the woman, so frightened she is unable to respond to Robbie's help, and the dilemma this causes for Robbie himself, who finally has to run alone in a situation which reminds him of 'nightmares'. A few candidates built on these linguistic and stylistic observations to consider the narrator, acknowledging that this section of the novel is Briony's invention. These argued in a thoughtful way that this forms part of her atonement, presenting Robbie throughout this section, exemplified by this passage, as a suffering hero.

Question 3

Stories of Ourselves, Volume 1

- (a) Examiners saw some interesting responses to this question on rooms and spaces. *The Prison*, *The Yellow Wallpaper*, *Billennium* and *The Door in the Wall* were all popular choices, while there were also some attempts to use *An Englishman's Home*, *Real Time* and *On White Hairs and Cricket*, which tended to be less successful. Many essays which considered the fantasy garden in *The Door in the Wall* were particularly successful, often demonstrating strong understanding of its symbolism and the ways in which it contrasts with the rest of Wallace's life. The garden was often contrasted with the privations of Wallace's actual home. The best essays interwove this with their other chosen stories (often *The Yellow Wallpaper* or *The Prison*) to show a strong understanding of the ways in which writers present spaces which both imprison and liberate.
- (b) It is rare for the passage-based question to be less popular than the open essay, but there were fewer responses to the extract from *An Englishman's Home*. A number of those responses came from candidates who did not know the story, which gave them a restricted understanding of the conversation between Colonel Hodge and Mr Hargood-Hood. Some other candidates gave a narrative account of the passage. Few were able to 'comment closely' on Waugh's writing and show appreciation of his satiric style, especially as understanding of the presentation of Hargood-Hood's calm and open demeanour depends on knowledge of how the story ends. A few essays noted the tension in the subtext beneath the polite chatter in the first section of the passage and some candidates noted Waugh's use of the time lapse between the first and second sections, creating a momentary suspense before the revelation of what the 'scientist' has in mind for the land he has purchased. Again, knowledge of the rest of the story was needed in order to fully appreciate why the proposal to build an 'experimental industrial laboratory' with 'two great chimneys' is so outrageous. The description here and knowledge of the story's conclusion, allowed the alert candidate to explore the cool deception in Hargood-Hood's side of the earlier dialogue.

Question 4

MARK TWAIN: *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

- (a) There was a small number of answers to this question and candidates tended to agree with the opening statement. Most responses showed the ability to select some key episodes from the novel which were disturbing, such as Pap's violence and the duke and the king's trickery, and other episodes which were comic, such as Huck's trickery and the freeing of Jim. More successful responses chose to examine sections of the novel which could be seen as both disturbing and comic at the same time, such as the absurdity of the feud between the Grangerfords and the Shepherdsons and its violent outcome. The strongest responses developed from that point to focus precisely on the question about the *effects* of this presentation, focusing on the ambiguities of Twain's style and the ways in which he uses these contrasting responses to highlight social injustices and offer criticism of some aspects of American society.
- (b) Since this passage contains such a key juncture of the novel, it was surprising how few candidates could identify 'the paper' which Huck is holding and what he has just done to feel 'good and all washed clean of sin'. Without that context, it was difficult for candidates to develop a competent commentary on the passage. Those who thought Huck tears a newspaper in l.20, or a sale poster for Jim, often misinterpreted the extract. More successful responses noted the importance of Huck's narrative voice here, as he negotiates between the approved actions of 'sivilized' society and his own conscience with regard to Jim. Most candidates were able to make some useful comments about his memories of Jim in the first paragraph of the extract as he 'went on thinking'. While less confident responses recounted the memories, those candidates who were more alert to the writing noted the inclusiveness in 'all the time, in the day, and in the night-time, sometimes moonlight, sometimes storms', the list showing the constancy of their companionship. The three verbs 'talking, and singing, and laughing' were recognised as important in conveying the relaxed easy comfort of their friendship. In particular, these responses identified the examples of Jim's fidelity and care, noting that Huck's recognition of 'how good he always was' runs contrary to the expectations of enslaved people in America at this time. The number of episodes from the novel which are cited in Huck's thoughts is another way in which Twain indicates the length and strength of their mutual support and many candidates noted the strength of Huck's final thought that Jim has referred to him as 'the best friend old Jim ever had in the world, and the *only* one he's got now'. There were some pertinent comments on the emphasis of the italics, which juxtaposed with Huck's renewed sight of the paper, cause his dilemma. His ironic decision to 'take up wickedness again', however, could only be properly understood by those who knew the paper was his letter surrendering Jim to Miss Watson.

Section B: Unseen

Question 5 – Poetry

Starting with the direction of the question and the title of the poem is a sensible approach, and it would have helped those candidates who attempted to argue that the poem is about a conflict between animals. On the other hand, there were many responses to *Death of a Lady* which demonstrated clearer understanding. Among these, there were many effective comments on the personification of death and the metaphors of the leopard, the lamb and the cob of corn. The use of the latter to describe a long, slow death was well understood by several candidates. Many candidates interpreted the reference to the 'hand early on her breast' as an indication of breast cancer, an interpretation which fits comfortably within the poem. Some, though, also connected it with the male personification of death, who has been 'attracted' to the lady more than 'Her sisters much riper in/All things a man wants.' This, they argued, also creates a suggestion of assault, and these two interpretations work well together. Examiners saw some effective exploration of the predatory leopard and how the image of its treatment of the lamb evokes a temporary recovery before the final decline to death. Candidates recognised how by using this metaphor, the poet creates a sense of the cruelty of death, particularly with the further simile of the cob of corn. The gradual, determined and merciless characteristics of death are exemplified by the way the cob is 'picked/between thumbs', 'piece by piece'. There were also many thoughtful comments on the effect of the final question, which suggests the remorselessness of death and the randomness of its selection of victims. Many noted that the poem is free verse, with limited punctuation. This led to some imaginative interpretations, few of which were convincing. More successful comments noted how the enjambment leads the reader through the poem at pace, with no end-stopped lines until the final question. Some also noted that the poem contains three sentences, the first establishing death's hold on the lady, the second introducing the leopard and lamb metaphor, and the final long sentence running through without pause from the brief respite, through the rapid failing to the final death.

Question 6 – Prose

This prose passage demanded quite careful reading, which unfortunately a large number of candidates did not give to it. It is always a good idea to read the whole passage through carefully with the question in mind before starting to write. Crucially, many candidates were unable to identify the two different visitors to the prison in paragraphs one and two. They overlooked 'the stranger' which begins paragraph two and assumed that this paragraph continues to present Aila. Others thought that it was Aila who was imprisoned and were impressed that she remains so well dressed when incarcerated. These errors led to restricted understanding of the passage. Those who read more carefully and had a better understanding were able to see how the two paragraphs, and the two meetings, contrast with each other. Their answers explored how the intimate relationship in paragraph one contains limited communication, while paradoxically the prisoner learns much more from the 'stranger' in paragraph two, who can use the 'private, oblique language' which eludes Aila. Many noted the presentation of Aila herself, with adjectives and adverbs such as 'smoothly', 'elegant', 'beautiful' and 'carefully'. They recognised that the writer suggests that her poise is constructed in order to reassure the prisoner, evidently her husband, that 'at home ... everything was the same'. Candidates noted that their communications, about 'Will' and 'Baby', are relatively banal, and that real communication is restricted by the prison's rule on 'family matters'. This lack of communication is emphasised by the contrast of silences, which 'at home' were 'so comfortable, natural in their closeness', but now in the prison are 'a real silence without communication of any kind.' The writer portrays Aila's discomfort in the surroundings with the observation that 'she held her arms close to her sides as if to draw away from the presence of the warders'. On the other hand, the 'stranger from the human rights organization', explicitly identified at the start of the second paragraph, despite her 'narrow blue eyes' which lack 'variety of expression', is able to circumvent the prison's restrictions and gives him news 'ingeniously in an abstract vocabulary'. A number of candidates recognised from the details of her news, and the reference to 'comrades', that the passage is about a political prisoner of some kind. The clues are in references to 'hunger strike', 'the Supreme Court' and 'he might expect to be charged soon.' The stranger's skill in using the coded language is clear, some candidates commented, by the fact that these vital pieces of information are disguised as references to 'food', 'how very stuffy it was ... in Pretoria' and 'crowded places [getting] hotter'. In this way, the writer shows how ordinary language can be given different layers of meaning, so successfully that the guards are 'blinking dully and even yawning' before they 'ceased to listen'. Some candidates noted how with this description, the narrator, though anonymous and third person, indicates sympathy with the prisoner and contempt for the intelligence of the warders.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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

Key messages

- Responses which rely on summary of the set texts or unseen extracts are not successful.
- Successful responses focus closely on the writing of the texts and how the writer presents the meaning and content to the reader.
- Responding to the passage-based **(b)** questions as unseen material, without knowledge and understanding of the wider text, usually leads to a restricted understanding of the passage.
- It can be useful to place a set text passage in context at the beginning of the essay or give an overview of the candidate's understanding of the unseen passage at the start.
- When responding to a question from **Section B: Unseen**, candidates should carefully read though the text in order to be confident about its meaning before beginning to write their answer.

General comments

The different set texts were well represented in this series, though Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* was less widely covered. All the unseen options proved popular, with a fairly even split between them on each paper. As happened last year, Examiners noted a clear difference between those responses to **(b)** passage questions on the set texts which were based on a knowledge and understanding of the whole text, and those where the candidates had approached the passages as unseen material. The lack of textual knowledge led to serious misunderstanding in many cases and usually led to restricted, generalised answers. On the other hand, candidates who could draw on their wider knowledge of the texts were able to contextualise the extracts and demonstrate understanding of the development or structure of the texts.

Question prompts such as 'presentation' and 'ways in which' are designed to encourage candidates to show their understanding of the writers' choices of form, structure and language and the effects these have on the communication of meaning. Successful essays respond explicitly to these prompts and use specific references and quotations in the **(a)** questions to maintain this focus. In passage-based **(b)** questions, successful essays focus in detail on the extract printed on the question paper in order to analyse the writing closely. Teaching for **Section B: Unseen** should introduce candidates to a wide range of different genres and styles so that they have a good grounding in key features and conventions of poetry, prose and drama.

Question specific comments

Section A: Prose

Question 1

KIRAN DESAI: *The Inheritance of Loss*

- (a)** Most candidates who responded to this question about the relationship between Sai and Jemubhai were able to comment on the lack of closeness between Sai and her grandfather, recognising Jemubhai's adoption of Sai as a matter of duty rather than affection. Competent essays commented on their similarities, such as their western-style education and snobberies, but noted that Desai always presents their relationship formally, with little sense of an emotional quality. This allowed some relevant exploration of the two characters' backgrounds, and more developed answers sometimes compared Jemubhai's cold treatment of Sai with the affection he lavishes on Mutt, his dog. Others considered that Desai presents Sai's affectionate relationship with the cook as an indirect criticism of her grandfather's coldness. Candidates also contrasted the warmth of the

relationship between the cook and Biju with that between Sai and Jemubhai, as the more humble characters are shown to share much stronger familial affection. While some answers noted Jemubhai's care in securing an education for Sai at Cho Oyo, they also suggested that Sai's relationship with Gyan demonstrates her own capacity for love and indicates that she is starved of emotional reciprocation.

- (b) A number of answers to this question described the argument and recognised the passion in it, using some references and quotations illustratively. More careful candidates, though, demonstrated how careful elucidation of the references could lead to a thoughtful and perceptive reading of the extract. Some of the strongest responses look closely at the second paragraph, with its references to 'the conflict in [Gyan's] life', which provide the basis for the argument which follows. Candidates noted the balance in the argument, Desai leading the reader to understand the hurt on both sides. There were perceptive comments on the way the argument is a product of the aftermath of colonialism, with Gyan's rejection of the western pretensions and privilege of Sai's family, 'eating *cheese toast*' on the 'veranda'. At the same time, Sai argues from her position of privilege, with Desai surprising the reader with her outpouring of snobbery in her scathing reference to 'low-class family, uncultured, arranged-marriage types'. Alert candidates noted that Desai's narration informs the reader that 'she grew steadily more horrified by the vermin that coursed from her mouth', with 'coursed' suggesting a torrent that she cannot control, while 'vermin' is a powerful metaphor evoking sharp teeth and dirt. Stronger responses were also able to show how Desai orchestrates the argument, with increasingly aggressive dialogue descending into physical conflict at the end of the passage. Good answers discussed Desai's characteristic use of typography, here using italicisation and capitalisation to communicate the fury and frustration of the characters' speech.

Question 2

IAN McEWAN: *Atonement*

- (a) Less successful responses to this question used it as a prompt to recount what happens to Cecilia and Robbie in the course of the novel, leading to lengthy narrative summary with limited address to the question. More careful essays, with a firmer grasp of the question, considered Briony as a writer and the way she admits that she has manipulated the story to present Cecilia and Robbie as romantic heroes who live happily ever after. These responses considered Briony's sense of guilt because of her mistaken accusation of Robbie and her use of the novel as her atonement, giving her sister and her lover 'a final act of kindness'. This sometimes led to thoughtful consideration of whether the false creation of a romantic survival for Robbie and Cecilia does in fact count as a 'kindness', since they cannot benefit. Many candidates argued, some fluently and persuasively, that the 'kindness' is to Briony herself, an attempt to assuage her guilt, and has no benefit to Robbie and Cecilia at all. The most successful responses were able to choose specific episodes from the novel and discuss them in detail to support the argument. While many were firmly condemnatory of Briony and her actions, the most subtle responses explored the ambiguities of McEwan's presentation, seeing her as grievously mistaken but not criminal in her accusation of Robbie, and recognising her desire, albeit futile, to attempt to put matters right in her version of events. While a number of answers referred to metafiction, this was not always discussed with understanding, only the strongest expanding the argument about Briony's control of her narrative to McEwan's own exploration of authorial decision-making and reader response.
- (b) Some responses to this question were hampered by misremembering which version of the fountain scene the passage was taken from. Some made much of the young Briony's perspective, but the passage comes from the first version of the scene, focalised from Cecilia's perspective (though of course later revealed to be part of Briony's narrative). Many candidates wrote enthusiastically and knowledgeably about the significance of the passage but overlooked the imperative to 'comment closely on McEwan's presentation of the event' described in it. More focused answers looked at the passage as one of uncertain communication, with no dialogue but full of actions, gestures and thoughts. Confident candidates discussed McEwan's presentation of Robbie's powerlessness, as he 'shook his head', 'glanced', 'pointed' and 'stood there dumbly', while Cecilia is presented as forthright and determined as she 'kicked', 'unbuttoned' and 'unfastened' her clothes before entering the water from which she emerges and 'dressed quickly' and 'thrust' her sandals with 'savage' movements. Candidates commented on the sensual sibilance employed in the 'silk sleeves' sentence and the reference to the 'frail white nymph', all of which creates a sense of vulnerability and an erotic undertone to suggest the sudden sexual awakening between Cecilia and Robbie. Several essays discussed not only the sexual provocativeness of Cecilia's undressing, but also saw it as her symbolic freeing of herself from the social and gender conventions of her time. Such

responses also were apt to focus on the 'roiling surface' of the water, recognising a metaphor for Robbie's suddenly awakened passions. The passage offered a great deal to those candidates who looked closely at McEwan's writing and commented closely on it.

Question 3

Stories of Ourselves, Volume 1

- (a) 'Home' proved a productive topic for candidates, with many of the stories from the selection appearing in responses. The most successful answers chose stories to fit a particular argument or interpretation and used precise knowledge of them to support the direction taken. For example, some looked at characters who find that their home is different from their house, looking at Sophy's material comfort in her house in London (*The Son's Veto*) and her homesickness for her rural life in Gaymead, matched with Wallace (*The Door in the Wall*) who finds a home-like comfort and security in the fantasy garden which eludes him in his actual home. Others considered homes which do not offer comfort, using *The Door in the Wall* again, with *The Yellow Wallpaper* or *Billennium*. Some considered the attempts, and the failures, to protect homes in *An Englishman's Home* and *Report on the Threatened City*, while there was some very good discussion of what home means to different people in stories such as *The People Before* and *To Da-duh, In Memoriam*. Most essays were structured by discussing one story and then the other, but some very fluent examples interwove the chosen stories throughout the discussion to provide comparison and contrasts between the writers' presentation. Features of less successful responses were a reliance on narrative summary or a lack of balance because one story was known far better than the other choice.
- (b) The passage from *Of White Hairs and Cricket* proved very popular and attracted some accomplished responses, especially from those candidates who were able to contextualise it within the rest of the story. The most confident discussed the passage as a reminiscence, the narrator recreating a nostalgic version of his childhood from the perspective of someone very aware of mortality. This opened the way for thoughtful discussion of the presentation of age in the passage, with the father's wilful denial of his advancing years compared with the grandmother's acceptance of her old age. Sensitive candidates explored the possibilities of metaphoric readings of her spinning of thread as fate and the thread of life, while the gramophone's spinning also has suggestions of time's continuance with references to 'round label', 'soothing blue and gold rotation', 'concentric rings', 'grooves' and 'spiral'. Some candidates discussed the presentation of gender roles, with Mamaiji and Mummy cooking and looking after the narrator while the father sits and reads the newspaper. Others explored the innocence of childhood, looking at the complexities of adult relationships, where there is disagreement and even argument, but 'no real enmity'. Thoughtful candidates also wrote about the richness of the childhood world which in the passage is 'so cosy and comforting', a comfort which is challenged by the rest of the story. There was appreciation of the colourful descriptions of meals, with Mamaiji's 'hot searing curries' compared with Mummy's food, 'tasteless as spit'. This was often included as part of a cultural discussion of the passage, with Mamaiji's spinning of fine thread for the family's kustis recognised as an adherence to traditional religion and culture, while the gramophone and Daddy's job search suggest modernisation and westernisation. Some of the less successful responses seemed to be uncertain of the passage, unable to use its context, and some candidates were unsure of the identity of the characters. On the other hand, some responses concentrated so much on contextual matters that they did not leave room for a close examination of the writing of the passage.

Question 4

MARK TWAIN: *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

- (a) Some candidates were excoriating on the subject of Huck's father, who had clearly come alive on the page as Twain intended. Some wrote of his neglect and abuse of his son, though often this was done as if Pap was a real person living in the present day. Candidates need to focus on Twain and ways in which he creates the characters. Many wrote at some length about Pap's alcoholism and avarice as well as the actions of locking up his son and holding him hostage, but only for his money. This was most successful when supported with examples of description or dialogue. Some more subtle responses considered Twain's presentation of Pap's traits which also appear in Huck, such as craftiness and the dislike of being 'civilized' or indoors. Thoughtful candidates also wrote that while old Finn lacks morals or caution, Huck is constantly portrayed trying to discriminate right from wrong while being cautious in everything he has to do. Many candidates discussed the

importance of Pap structurally, seeing him as the catalyst for Huck's escape and his journey of discovery and learning on the Mississippi. Jim, too, was often used fruitfully as a contrasting surrogate father-figure, whose own characterisation highlights the deficiencies in Pap. There was some good contextual discussion too, though too many saw Pap as a typical American citizen of the period. More thoughtfully, though, candidates often discussed Pap's abusive treatment of Huck as in some ways akin to 'civilized' Americans' treatment of enslaved people. Pap's death was also frequently the focus of good points, occurring early in the journey, but only revealed to Huck and the reader at the end of the novel.

- (b) The most successful responses to the passage came from candidates who knew the context of Chapter 11 and Huck's fact-finding mission in disguise. These appreciated the humour of the passage as the old woman sees through Huck's disguise. They commented on her kindly approach to him, showing sympathy and offering food. There was some careful discussion of the tension as Huck shakes 'like a leaf' and stammers when he is discovered, assuaged by the continual 'very pleasant' manner of the woman, whose dialogue remains calm and encouraging throughout, seen in, for example, 'Bless you, child, [...] that's a good boy.' Candidates discussed Huck's penchant for deceit, firstly in his girl's disguise, then his continued invention of a story once that disguise is unsuccessful, showing his quick-witted inventiveness. His 'clean breast' is not, as the reader might initially assume, the truth, but another convoluted lie. There were some thoughtful comments on the story he creates. Some candidates suggested that his claim that his 'mother and father was dead' reflects his orphan-like status, and indeed, although he does not at this point know it, both parents are in fact deceased. His story of secretive flight is also close to the truth and some suggested that his invention of Abner Moore is a manifestation of his longing for friendly relations, while the drunk who misdirects him is in some ways a reflection of his father. Candidates who were familiar with the context were also able to explain the extra tension in the passage arising from the contrast between the woman's kindness and her absent husband, who is out at that time hunting down Jim, necessitating Huck's rapid departure. There were also, though, unsuccessful responses which demonstrated a lack of knowledge of the novel, which lacked any acknowledgement of the context and were unable to recognise the old woman or remember why Huck is in disguise. These led to tentative, often inaccurate, narrative accounts of the passage.

Section B: Unseen

Question 5 – Prose

Some candidates dealt with the whole passage without appearing conscious of the question's focus on the incident, while others looked at the bicycle accident only. More thoughtful candidates considered the first part of the passage as a carefully crafted build-up to the accident and therefore were able to address the tonal shift from that point, with the narrator's humiliation and remorse. The passage proved accessible, with nearly all candidates understanding the development of the action and more sophisticated essays exploring the ways in which it is presented. Many considered, for example, the first-person narrative voice, giving the reader access to their thoughts, but not to Edna's. In this way, the writer presents the narrator's perception of Edna, seeing her as 'the trusting type', noting her 'green-and-red floral dress' and feeling the 'excitement of having her so close'. Candidates were able to discuss how readers are made aware of the narrator's attraction towards Edna, their pride in being 'rather good with bicycles' and refusal to 'admit too readily to being tired'. Some suggested that the narrator's 'heart raged like a bonfire' both with exertion and love, and many appreciated the humour of the cocky avowal that the narrator hadn't 'seen any hill yet' juxtaposed with them 'getting back some [...] breath'. These details prepare the reader for the incident with the sheep, which is accentuated with the short sentence 'I braked sharply.' There was also suggestion that the long sentence which follows (ll.22 – 23) shows that the narrator is seeking excuses in their careful explanation for how the accident happened. Examiners also saw some good discussion of the indications of Edna's feelings towards the narrator, in her agreement to ride the bicycle with them, her ease with her proximity 'within [their] arms' and her admiring dialogue, 'You are very strong [...] eating all the hills like yam.' Some candidates noted that these mutual feelings become mutual comfort after the accident, as Edna tells the narrator it wasn't 'your fault' and comes to 'dust [their] shoulder', while they apologise and offer money to replace the spoiled food. Candidates often understood the indications of a rural, less affluent location, with the 'rough approach' to Edna's house and the simple food lying on the 'sandy road'. Many were able to identify an African, and even a Nigerian, location from the references to 'yam' and 'foofoo'. A very few candidates explored the tone of the passage further, recognising both the humour in the portrayal of the unfortunate accident, and self-mockery, the narrator, in a retrospective narrative, pointing out their own vanity which contributes to the crash. This was, they argued, also apparent in the placement of the crash immediately after the narrator's bold claim that they had not 'seen any hill yet' and their frustrated description of the 'stupid sheep' with its 'four or five

lambs'. The suggestion was that the passage illustrates the old adage that pride comes before a fall, and that the narrator is very conscious of this adage in the way the passage is shaped.

Question 6 – Drama

While some candidates thought that the quarrel in this passage is actually between sheep and goats, others commented that the old-fashioned terms present the disagreement as timeless or symbolic. Those who were able to link the idea of a Chorus to Ancient Greek theatre also connected the extract to myth and legend. Many deduced from the references to 'goatherds', 'sheep-people' and 'mountains' that the argument presents a territorial dispute, and one which has clearly been going on for generations. The strongest responses were alive to the irony of the passage presenting peace talks between rival factions but being full of verbal and physical aggression. The repeated use of exclamation marks, challenges and insults in the dialogue were often noted, with a few extending this dramatically to consider tone of voice. While many did not attempt to discriminate between the numerous characters, some recognised that there are aggressors, such as Brag and Josef, peacemakers, like Mendel and Lena, and defeatists, like Mermer and Gregor. Though the dramatic function of a Chorus was not always understood, many were still able to recognise the observational tone of the comments made, and the wry humour in the paradoxes of 'So begin all peace talks/With a lot of shouting' and 'So begin all peace-talks/With violence'. Many too appreciated the way Sylvian crudely and comically caps these comments by adding 'So begin all peace-talks. With a lot of bullshit.' Candidates who were alert to dramatic methods responded well to the few stage directions, recognising the physical and visual impact of first Brag and then Josef drawing their knife. There was also plentiful good discussion of the way that the two characters '*circle each other*', which was often seen as gladiatorial in its staging, while others also saw the reference to '*circle*' as another indication of the never-ending cycle of disagreement and violence. While this moment of action in the passage drew plenty of comment, it was disappointing that very few identified and analysed the formal language of diplomacy and negotiation, about 'concessions', 'heightened tension', 'jeopardise the peace-talks' and 'their best interests to abrogate the use of armed force.' The few who did were able to link this kind of language with real, contemporary conflicts and negotiations, seeing the drama as a commentary on such events, and a very few noted the irony that these lines are spoken by Brag and Josef, the characters who were circling each other with knives moments before. This makes Sylvian's dismissal particularly apt.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/23
Prose and Unseen

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General comments

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Question specific comments

Section A: Prose

Question 1

KIRAN DESAI: *The Inheritance of Loss*

- (a)** Some good responses to this question about Biju's restaurant experiences in America gave a detailed account of the various restaurants that Biju works in. They noted that each one causes him different problems and shows a different aspect of America. Several essays commented that whatever the cuisine offered – French, American, Colonial, Italian – the staff in the kitchens are always immigrants from around the world, amongst whom Biju has to negotiate his position. More successful answers were able to use specific details and references, such as restaurant owners encouraging his personal hygiene, his fight with a Pakistani worker and the trials he encounters on his bicycle delivery service. Many commented on Biju's cultural crisis when working in a steak restaurant and his ultimate decision to leave, while there were also observant comments that even

in the Gandhi Café, run by Indians, Biju is not free from exploitation. Essays often featured thoughtful discussion of American consumption and consumerism, which depends on the work of illegal immigrants, while those immigrants like Biju live in fear of detection and are steadfastly focused on the elusive green card. Interestingly, relatively few answers explored the ways that Desai shows that Biju's experiences are far from what he anticipated when travelling to America, and that he has to deceive his father about his work and his wellbeing.

- (b) This was a popular passage and candidates appeared to enjoy writing about Saeed Saeed, though often the second half of the extract was treated sketchily. Most responses included discussion of Desai's presentation of Saeed Saeed's appearance, with the traditional 'white *kurta* pajama', overlaid with brash American accessories. These details, and his opening dialogue of '*Biju! Hey man*' demonstrate the hybrid which he has become, adopting aspects of American culture in order to assimilate and qualify for his green card. Close attention to the writing of the first section of the passage revealed the excessive punctuation which emphasises Biju's incredulity and the rap-like rhymes of ll.15 – 16 which suggest the ease of Saeed Saeed's sudden marriage and entry into American life. Candidates also commented on the intrusiveness of the INS questions and Saeed Saeed's gleeful subversion of the rules. Although a number of candidates commented on Desai's capitalisation of 'LOVE' in Saeed Saeed's speech in the second part of the passage, not many went further than that. Those who did examine this part were able to show that Toys' parents' affection for him are a product of their own political subversion as 'Vermont hippies' who 'would be happy to help' any kind of 'subversion against the US government'. They also showed how Saeed Saeed and his new wife turn away from both Saeed Saeed's culture and the 'co-op organic' food of Toys' family, mocked in the list of their preferences, in favour of 'white rice, white bread, white sugar' and 'fast-food'. Candidates saw this as further evidence of ways in which Desai shows Saeed Saeed embracing the cultural consumerist world of America.

Question 2

IAN McEWAN: *Atonement*

- (a) As a central question, this proved very popular, with a wide variety of responses. On the one hand, some candidates merely recounted the story of the novel, on the other were essays loaded with scholarly narrative theory which were not supported with much detail or references drawn from the novel itself. In between these extremes, however, were some thoughtful and insightful essays. Most considered Briony as the central story-teller, often beginning with 'The Trials of Arabella' as both a sign of her precociousness and as a metaphor for Cecilia and Robbie's relationship. Her desire for order was often seen reflected in her control of narratives. Clearly constructed responses recognised the centrality of her mistaken story about Robbie and Lola and looked at the way in which her storytelling from that point is presented as an attempt to assuage her guilt. Some candidates were able to refer helpfully to these stories, including Cecilia's hospital experience, Robbie's experience of the war and their apparent resumption of their relationship afterwards. Many candidates focused on the revelations of the end of the novel which reveal Briony's role as narrator and cause the reader's revaluation of the story they have been reading. A few essays were able to develop this discussion to explore the novel's use of different narrative modes, for example, in the way that Briony's voice in Part 1 constitutes both a child's perception and an adult's literary narrative, while also using different narrative perspectives to examine key moments, such as the fountain incident. There was also some thoughtful consideration of Part 2 of the novel, considering Briony's later revelation that it is an imaginative reconstruction from research and letters. This allowed discussion of ways in which stories are told, rather than just what stories are told and why. This discussion was often quite sophisticated in its approach, with consideration of narrative viewpoint and the responsibility of the author. What was surprising, however, was how few candidates moved on from their discussion of Briony's storytelling to consider McEwan's, and what questions about narrative and stories he raises with his metafiction.
- (b) This passage was also popular, though frequently candidates described the action and explored its significance in the novel without closely examining the writing of the passage to consider ways in which McEwan presents Briony's perception. Strong answers began right at the beginning of the passage, noting that it starts with Briony transferring some of the blame for her intrusion into the library onto her absent father. There were also some useful references to wider context as some recognised the twins composing their note, foreshadowing their later disappearance and the events which surround it. Many candidates noted the reference to Robbie's crude note to Cecilia, which colours Briony's perception of Robbie and ensures that she sees herself as 'her sister's protector'. There were thoughtful comments on the muffled sounds from within the library which draw her

attention and create anticipation for the reader. The third paragraph, ll.16 – 29, drew the most focused comment, with many candidates observing the darkness which literally and metaphorically obscures the clarity of Briony's perception, reducing Cecilia and Robbie to 'dark shapes' in the 'gloom'. There were comments on how her interpretation of what she sees fulfils a narrative she has already formed, moving from 'what she saw must have been shaped in part by what she already knew' to 'the scene was so entirely a realisation of her worst fears'. Others commented on the revealing reference to 'her over-anxious imagination' and discussed how her perception of violence in 'pushed', 'pushing', 'trapped', 'gripping' and 'held' is already recognised by the reader to be sexual passion. Some saw the dark description as a sign of Briony's interest in the Gothic, and her description of Robbie as 'so huge and wild', juxtaposed with Cecilia's 'bare shoulders and thin arms so frail' present them as monster and vulnerable princess from a fairy tale, fitting the modes of her childhood stories. Some developed responses took these observations further, considering ways in which McEwan presents Briony's perception through her own later narration, about which there are some clear hints, such as the sentence that she 'later gave this matter some thought'. These answers suggested that Briony's retrospective narration shapes the events in a way which seeks to excuse her mistake, by emphasising her innocence. For this argument, sentences such as 'what she saw must have been shaped in part by what she already knew, or believed she knew' were very important to show how the elder narrator reflects on previous experience. While many candidates condemned Briony for the conclusions she mistakenly reaches, many others were aware that a young child would have little understanding of what she encounters and the recreation of her perception in the passage portrays that lack of comprehension.

Question 3

Stories of Ourselves, Volume 1

- (a) The question on buildings prompted responses on a number of stories in the selection, with the most commonly addressed being *The Yellow Wallpaper*, *An Englishman's Home*, *Billennium*, *Games at Twilight*, *The Prison* and *To Da-duh, in Memoriam*. While less successful responses relied on narrative summary, often without real consideration of the question, some candidates interpreted the question in interesting ways, and often drew thoughtful comparisons between their chosen stories. For example, there was perceptive writing on ways in which Gilman's heroine is trapped by the building and its fixtures, while there was occasional sharp discussion of the imaginary factory building in Waugh's story, whose fictitious plans cause such distress among the inhabitants of Much Malcock. The description of the eerie and neglected shed in *Games at Twilight* provided opportunities for discussion of a different kind of building, while the crowding and subdivision of buildings in Ballard's story was seen to dehumanise the residents of those buildings. The metaphoric title of *The Prison* was discussed, showing how the shop constrains Tommy's life and dreams, while there was some observant discussion of the significance of the Empire State Building in *To Da-duh, in Memoriam*, having a momentous effect on Da-duh even though it does not actually appear in the story. Successful candidates selected references carefully from their chosen stories which supported the arguments they constructed in response to the specifics of the question.
- (b) Some less successful narrative essays on this passage sometimes demonstrated limited understanding of the narrator and what they describe, though most had some grasp of technologically-advanced aliens observing humanity on earth. Other responses, particularly from candidates who had some knowledge of the context of the Cold War and the San Francisco earthquake, were able to explore the aliens' perception of the earth more fruitfully. Candidates often commented on the judgemental objectivity of the alien's view, as they try 'to determine what form of brain' human beings have and try to explain 'the gap in their mental structure'. These judgements and references to 'spacecraft' and 'Astroviewers' present the aliens as far more advanced than humanity and several candidates commented on their use of biological language, describing the human population as 'specimens' of a 'species'. While some candidates criticised them for this coldness, others recognised their altruism, putting huge resources 'to develop a spacecraft that could make the journey' in order to offer 'our assistance', 'as we have done for other planets'. A few essays made the point that Lessing's aliens challenge the general view, particularly in popular fiction at the time this story was written, of hostile invaders. Fewer responses than anticipated developed these observations fully enough to explore the aliens' conclusion that 'this species [...] doesn't seem to care' and ways in which Lessing uses this to examine human behaviour. Examiners also found it surprising that very few candidates considered the written style of the passage as a report, with its formal tone, separate sections and subheadings, making it significantly different from a conventional literary story. Opportunities were missed to analyse the

first-person plural narration, its dry bureaucratic language and careful, detailed explanations. Very few candidates referred to the 'PRIORITY' sections at all.

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 very few responses to this question. Those who attempted it tended to write about the moral development of Huck or the work as a bildungsroman, rather than focusing on the written style and Huck's attitude to the villains. More successful answers considered ways in which Twain presents this episode to represent another stage in Huck's growing moral sense of justice – while a trickster himself, he thinks with caution for himself but also sympathises with the innocent women who are being robbed. Some focused on his expression of empathy with the sisters, as he feels 'so ornery and low down and mean', words which apply to the duke and the king. Huck's opposition to them is presented in his determination to correct the wrong 'or bust'. There were also opportunities for analysing how Twain presents Huck's thinking process like a casual colloquial conversation, with its rejection of ideas in phrases such as 'No – I dasn't do it.' Some candidates commented that although it is a retrospective narration, this style leads the reader directly into Huck's thoughts at that moment, emphasised by his use of the present tense: 'So, thinks I [...]' The passage of his thoughts clearly portrays his desire to subvert the duke's and king's intentions. A few commented on the humour of his first choice of hiding place being immediately checked by the duke, and that in this scene, Huck's deception gives him the ascendancy over the two conmen. The separation between them, Huck hidden and them planning, and Huck feeling 'pretty bad' at their plans, demonstrate his moral growth.

Section B: Unseen

Question 5 – Drama

While a number of candidates misread 'refuge' and saw 'refugee', this did not impact on their answers if they were sensitive to the dynamics of the relationship between Kamla and Rajinder. However, it was also clear that a number of candidates had not read the passage carefully enough, with a significant number thinking Rajinder is a man, despite the conversation in ll.52-55. This illustrates the importance of reading the whole passage before beginning to write. Some of the most successful answers began with consideration of the opening stage direction and Kamla's phone call, recognising that these set the location and give some key indications of Kamla's role and character. Candidates who looked at this section recognised that she is established in a position of authority, offering advice and help, while Rajinder enters quietly and compliantly, with all the indications that, like Katie on the phone, she too needs Kamla's assistance. This sets up the basis for their differing attitudes in their disagreements in the passage. Observant candidates who were sensitive to the creation of tone noted that these disagreements are implicitly suggested in the opening exchanges between the women, with Kamla offering a sequence of leading questions, again demonstrating her role, while Rajinder follows with a number of non-committal replies which construct barriers against Kamla's advances. This is emphasised by the '[Pause]' in l.20 and a number of observant candidates saw some self-deprecation in Kamla's correction of herself in this line, suggesting understanding and empathy for Rajinder. There were also good comments analysing the structure of the dialogue which shows the awkwardness of the conversation even when Rajinder starts to disclose more, particularly in the short sentences and gaps in 'I'm managing.//Good. Great to hear that. [Pause]'. The subsequent part of the passage was where most candidates found something to say, though a minority picked up on Rajinder's comment about her 'BA in India', which shows her status and education, but also her resentment that she 'can't do much with it here.' The more explicit disagreement about horoscopes drew the most discussion, with candidates taking different views. Some saw in Kamla's comment 'You don't believe in all that seriously though, do you?' a tone of contempt for Rajinder's beliefs, suggesting a personal and cultural insensitivity, while others viewed her as giving a clear practical view in response to Rajinder's unrealistic expectations. Either view can be supported, though some candidates brought to the passage some cultural knowledge and awareness that horoscopes are valued in parts of the world. Some alert candidates did note, though, that Kamla partially retracts in l.41 before continuing, after another pause, by encouraging 'retraining', which suggests she still is not convinced by the horoscopes plan. Fewer candidates looked carefully at the last part of the passage, ll.44 – 60, where the differing views become more heated. Those who did examine this part noted the frequent ellipses in Rajinder's speech ll.48 – 50, suggesting she finds this difficult to speak about, followed by a perhaps aggressive rejoinder from Kamla, with its exclamation and blunt statement. Some candidates commented on the sudden burst of defensive snobbery from Rajinder, separating herself from

'your illiterate working class women', showing that at this stage of the drama, neither woman is presenting herself well. Kamla's blunt imperative statements continue, stating what Rajinder has 'got to' do, but this is also where the nub of the matter is revealed. This, and the difficulty Rajinder expresses of explaining 'to some stranger the history of fifteen years of marriage, exposing [sic] every intimate detail of [her] life' draws sympathy to her position, though the scathing '*haan?*' and dismissive 'but then you wouldn't know about it' continue the aggression between the two women. Candidates who had not fully explored the passage, unfortunately, missed these developments.

Question 6 – Poetry

Many candidates responded to some of the central ideas of this poem, often with thought and sensitivity, even when they had not fully understood the whole. Few candidates read the poem with real care, following not just the stanzas and the imagery, but the sentences in order fully to understand the poem's developing meaning. The key problem here lay in stanza two, which many candidates quietly ignored, perhaps intimidated by the 'rural chaplets'. However, even those who noted the reference to 'wise men' often did not follow the sense of the sentences through the stanzas to realise that the pronoun 'they' in stanza three continues the reference to the 'wise men', and that the imperative at the beginning of stanza four, 'seek out', is still the 'wise men' speaking. Therefore, the volta of the poem begins halfway through l.13, appropriately with 'yet', not at the beginning of the fourth stanza, which many candidates suggested. Missing the poem's differentiation between the suggestions of the 'wise men' and the speaker's own statements led to some significant misinterpretations which could have been avoided by a careful reading of the grammar of the poem. Even candidates who had not followed the full meaning, though, were able to make relevant points about poetry's changing subject matter and metaphoric reference points. Many recognised the challenge to the old and apparently outmoded, created by modern technology and machinery. Most also saw that the poem ends with a tone of resolution, arguing that older ideas are never truly obsolete. Many essays considered the repeated questions at the beginning of stanzas one and two, providing the initial impetus of the poem and suggesting the urgency of the enquiry. Good understanding of the symbolic imagery of the phoenix and unicorn was also frequently shown, though some overlooked the implications of the phoenix's 'final ash', suggesting that its fabled resurrection skills have come to an end. The force of 'dead' after the caesura in l.4 was often noted, and candidates were alert to the contrast between the fantastical references of stanza one and the duller, mechanised references of stanza three, towards which the 'wise men' direct the speaker's attention. Few noted that the intervention of the 'wise men' in stanza two includes the indication of the obsolescence of older ideas, linking the phoenix and unicorn with the 'rural chaplets' which are deemed inappropriate now for a 'modern brow'. There were some interesting comments that, though the language and imagery used to describe the industrial 'cranes' and 'turbines' is stark and less attractive than that used in the first stanza, it is still evocative. These noted that 'skeletoned' is both a visual reminder of the struts of a crane, and suggests death, while there is a possible excitement in the 'rhythm' of machinery, though the onomatopoeic 'whine' of the turbines recreates an unpleasant sound. The phrase 'old patterns call for an old word' was noted by many and considered to be the speaker reclaiming ideas which the 'wise men' reject. Examiners saw a number of thoughtful responses which, while noting the soft gentle imagery of the 'ship in sail' and 'snow' which 'falls slowly' in the final stanza, also connected the 'moon' and 'a bird' with the 'moonlight' and 'phoenix' of stanza one, returning the poem to its starting point. Most candidates, though not all, recognised the alternating rhyme scheme, traditional in poetry for centuries, and a few noted that this fails in l.15 in the final stanza, which is also marked by the absence of alternating indentations. Some commented that these features mark this stanza out clearly as the conclusion. There were difficulties with the rhythm, with some candidates arguing that the poem is free verse while others argued it is consistent iambic pentameter. Either view missed the shifts in the rhythm, like the initial trochees which give the imperatives such force in ll.9 and 13, the awkwardness of stanza three and the way the longer lines 9 – 14 are resolved into almost perfect iambic pentameter in the final two lines of the poem, with their return to traditional imagery. Although this was a complex poem, it afforded candidates much to wrestle with and led to some interesting and thoughtful work.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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

Key messages

- Examiners noted that many of the candidates who wrote rather less actually provided better responses.
- Responses to **(a)**-type questions were greatly improved by reference to particular moments in the play, especially when supported by quotations.
- Candidates who demonstrated that they had thought hard about the genre of the text and its implications do better than those responding to the play as a text to be read. This was particularly true for candidates responding to **(b)**-type questions

General comments

Please note that Paper 31 is taken by a very restricted number of candidates in this session. It follows therefore that examiners may not have seen answers at all levels on all texts.

This paper is now very well-established, so most of what follows in terms of general comments will be familiar to readers.

Some candidates could usefully give more attention to how the questions are structured. A question often begins with 'In what ways', an instruction that allows access for all candidates, even those who only present a fairly narrative account in order to make their points. The key discriminator comes with the words 'and with what dramatic effects', or some related formulation, which points to the need to discuss particular moments with attention to language, form and action in order to demonstrate a close understanding of how a writer creates meaning. Some candidates omit or rarely mention the writer's name and thus give no sense that there is a mind behind the text which is shaping our response to the drama. Perhaps the easiest way to illustrate this is with reference to punctuation. Many candidates refer to this as a 'way' in which a writer creates meaning, but it is only by pointing out that an ellipsis in the printed text creates (perhaps) tension between characters when on stage that the observation becomes valid as a part of 'dramatic presentation'. On a drama paper, there is usually something to be made of the stage directions, particularly when a question asks about dramatic effects. As with discussions about punctuation, points need to be validated by a demonstration of how the stage direction, enacted, will create meaning in terms of either character or theme.

Whilst essay plans are neither read nor rewarded by examiners, candidates are often well served by having some sense of how they are going to structure and present their ideas. At lower levels the plot of a text sometimes serves for a structure, but such responses are generally limited. With **(b)**-type questions, a line-by-line approach is sometimes used. This too has its limitations, as the candidate often then fails to take a view of the whole, a strategic view of the dramatic arc that is presented. Better answers will indicate a sense of an argument from the beginning, laying out a clear sense of direction. It is worth reminding candidates that assessment of this subject is partly an assessment of writing ability (**Assessment Objective 4 Communication**). It follows, therefore, that less is often better than more because it suggests an ability to select what is truly germane to a question. Some candidates write a lot, and this is often counter-productive because it suggests to the examiner that conciseness of thought and expression is not being truly valued. Some candidates could usefully spend time when preparing for the examination in refining their essay technique, making more use of discourse markers to demonstrate their ability to construct an argument, not just make a series of points. There are, of course, lengthy essays of the highest quality – but the majority of really long essays simply penalise themselves because they fail to focus sufficiently on the question.

Reports on this paper have often mentioned the difference between 'context' and background information. In stronger responses, contexts are integrated, to form part of the candidate's argument, not a bolt-on extra. Biographical information about a writer, tempting as it is to provide, tends to be irrelevant in most cases.

Candidates need to be careful, too, about asserting things that may or may not be true. For example, assertions about how women were 'always' subservient in Elizabethan/Jacobean times would have been news to both Queen Elizabeth I and Shakespeare's Cleopatra. Contexts need to be used with caution and only when relevant to a candidate's developing thinking about the question asked.

As noted previously in reports, candidates are not always secure in including the opinions of others (**Assessment Objective 5 Evaluation of opinion**). Sometimes examiners take it that this element is implicitly covered because a candidate is arguing a particular line with conviction, perhaps showing that other views have been considered and then dismissed. However, candidates are advised to be explicit. One way of doing so is simply to note that a scene of issue could be differently considered. Confident candidates are often explicit about another view in order to either disagree or reinforce their own arguments. Theatre productions and films are both, of course, a perfectly legitimate way of demonstrating this Assessment Objective. However, candidates need to be cautious about this, remembering throughout that one director's interpretation will, by definition, be personal and partial and may ignore or omit parts of a script that do not suit the director's view. Candidates who have focused on one particular production rather than their own close reading of the whole text as prescribed can disadvantage themselves because they accept too readily that what they have seen is only one possible reading of the text.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Shakespeare

Question 1

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Hamlet*

- (a) All candidates were able to see that the appearance of Hamlet's father's ghost triggers the action of the play, giving support to Hamlet's suspicions. Strangely, some argued that only Hamlet sees the ghost, a point that is negated by the first line of the play. Better responses often suggested that although many see the ghost, thus demonstrating that all is not right in Denmark, it is only Hamlet who hears it speak. With the best candidates, this sometimes led to the thought that what the ghost says could be a projection by Hamlet. In other words, the ghost says what Hamlet wants him to say, is an 'objective correlative', as the critics say. Candidates were able to give a clear account of the consequences of the ghost's early intervention. A few candidates were able to remark on the ghost's intervention in the scene between Hamlet and his mother, an intervention which arguably changes Hamlet's feelings towards his mother and her part in his father's death. Some candidates tussled – to good effect – with Christian theology and belief in ghosts, a point that often took them to Claudius's attempts to pray. Candidates were clear that, for all it appears infrequently, the ghost haunts the entire play, contributing to Hamlet's thinking and delay elsewhere when he wonders if 'the spirit I have seen/May be a devil' and therefore be untrustworthy.
- (b) The best candidates recognised that this question was an invitation to link the soliloquy provided with other instances of moments where Hamlet reflects on his position. Some pointed out that the soliloquies are a self-indulgence, the very means by which Hamlet delays. On the whole, candidates did not really engage with the detail of this particular speech or, if they did, it came across as a series of observations rather than an overall argument. The best candidates were, of course, able to analyse the process of Hamlet's thought as he talks about how the players can fake emotions that he himself feels. They were also able to talk about his feelings of ignoble filial guilt ('O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!') where he reproaches himself for lacking princely virtues, a point he makes elsewhere when he contrasts himself with men of action. Some candidates argued that Hamlet rouses himself into a fever of longing for vengeance and a fit of self-recrimination, with his recognition that he seeks to "unpack [his] heart with words". But rather than doing something about his anger, Hamlet then falls to plotting the play within a play, yet another means of delaying his revenge.

Question 2

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *The Merchant of Venice*

- (a) A small number of candidates did not really understand the term 'self-interest'. Most were able to explore the tension announced in the question prompt with suitable examples. The most popular explorations centred round whether Bassanio really loves Portia, or whether his affection for her is

tempered (or entirely governed) by his desire to move up in the world financially. The purest feelings were often seen to be those of Antonio for Bassanio – he acts unselfishly throughout, offering to sacrifice all for his friend. Many responses suggested that there is a homoerotic element to the friendship, something often brought out in modern productions. The textual evidence for this is scanty, and candidates often relied on a particular director's production in order to argue the case. Some candidates sensibly suggested that Portia's behaviour in the casket scene epitomises the issue. She loves Bassanio, so it is entirely in her own interest to make sure that the other suitors fail, which she does stealthily through what she says. Discussions about Shylock tended to be quite simple, with much being made of his paralleling the loss of Jessica with the loss of his ducats.

- (b) Candidates are not required to place the extract given within the context of the play. Sometimes, indeed, it leads to narrative. But in this instance, a number of candidates forgot to mention that Portia is, at this moment, disguised as a man, a central driver of the scene's action. More acute responses were able to remark on the fact that Portia is able to take on a man's world on its own terms when in disguise and is esteemed for her judgement and articulacy, as demonstrated by the Duke's invitation to dinner. The meat of the scene is, of course, Portia's deception of Bassanio and Antonio in order to establish their true worth. A number of responses got side-tracked into talking about the relationship between Bassanio and Antonio. Portia's outwitting of the two is symptomatic of her 'dealings' with men (including Shylock and the other suitors) elsewhere in the play, as many pointed out. A number of candidates pointed out sensibly that this scene turns the mood of the play from darkness to light by allowing the final resolution in Act 5. Some answers got very stuck on feminist views of Portia and a condemnation of the patriarchy, without really reflecting on the ways in which Portia manipulates the system she finds herself in, becoming the victor not the victim.

Section B: Drama

Question 3

ATHOL FUGARD: *The Train Driver and Other Plays*

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

Question 4

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

- (a) Candidates were able to evoke a range of types of suffering in the play. The most popular focus was on Mary and her addictions and on the effects of tuberculosis on Edmund. There was often much concentration on the symbols in the play, with the fog adduced to demonstrate how O'Neill shows the family to be lost in the uncertain shadows of their varying personalities. The best answers were able to demonstrate the tensions within the family and show how each of the family makes others miserable, how they trade on each other's ambitions and weaknesses in order to make the others suffer. Some of what is said is, as candidates noted, the everyday hurt of families living together. But at times the characters act deliberately to wound or undermine. There were some interesting discussions of the dependence on alcohol, the men's drug of choice to insulate themselves against emotion. Some candidates pointed out, however, that the loosening of tongues that alcohol causes is also part of the problem. At times, many candidates would have done better to refer more specifically to particular moments, providing quotes from the text.
- (b) All candidates noted that Mary is nostalgically stuck in the past and that she uses her drugs to escape current reality. Candidates noted her tone of detachment, her self-preoccupation and her feelings of hopelessness. Better candidates were able to see how she often interrupts herself ('It has always stood between me and – [...] But let's not talk of old things that couldn't be helped.') as a means of not confronting what she is really feeling. Candidates noted that she finds the fog both a threat and a comfort. They noted, too, that the fog is a symbol in the play as a whole. There was some focus at times on various ways in which Mary lies unconvincingly both to herself and to others, for example 'The medicine for the rheumatism in my hands.' Strangely, not many responses looked at the function of Cathleen in the scene. Cathleen gives the audience a steer about the reality of what is happening ('If I didn't know better, I'd think you'd a drop taken.'). Hers is the only voice in the play that is not emotionally involved and thus able to give us an unbiased perspective

on both Mary and the family as a whole. There was often useful discussion of the clues that we are given through O'Neill's extensive stage directions, which shape Mary's speeches just as much as the words, both here and elsewhere.

Question 5

SHELAGH STEPHENSON: *An Experiment with an Air Pump*

- (a) Candidates saw the tension between science and the arts as central to the play. Many responses suggested that Harriet's play is central as it portrays the arts as fundamentally feminine in inspiration, hence of no interest to Fenwick. Better responses were able to see that the modern element of the play interrogates this, with Tom representing the arts. Most answers took a character-based approach that was sometimes rather reductive, with each character standing solely for one aspect of the issue. More subtle responses were able to see that the structure of the play helps create the issue. One or two very good answers suggested that the double casting – with the actor playing Tom also playing Fenwick – in itself creates the issue in the play.
- (b) This disturbing extract found many takers and they made much of it. Nearly all candidates were able to exploit it to some degree as a kind of index of Armstrong's characterisation from his lack of ethics to his language so lacking in any kind of self-awareness, via excursions into the rest of the play where all the personality traits he demonstrates here are exemplified by his actions and decisions and especially by his treatment of the doomed Isobel. The more perceptive and confident answers also explored the dramatic function of his companion Roget as a moral commentator, shocked by what his friend has in mind. The two young men were seen as 'foils', but some more subtle responses chose to examine Roget in his own right as a forerunner to some of the more ethical scientific thinkers seen in the play's later time frame. Many answers saw the shuttlecock as a visual representation of the issues being discussed.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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

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Candidates need to be careful, too, about asserting things that may or may not be true. For example, assertions about how women were 'always' subservient in Elizabethan/Jacobean times would have been news to both Queen Elizabeth I and Shakespeare's Cleopatra. Contexts need to be used with caution and only when relevant to a candidate's developing thinking about the question asked.

As noted previously in reports, candidates are not always secure in including the opinions of others (**Assessment Objective 5 Evaluation of opinion**). Sometimes examiners take it that this element is implicitly covered because a candidate is arguing a particular line with conviction, perhaps showing that other views have been considered and then dismissed. However, candidates are advised to be explicit. One way of doing so is simply to note that a scene of issue could be differently considered. Confident candidates are often explicit about another view in order to either disagree or reinforce their own arguments. Theatre productions and films are both, of course, a perfectly legitimate way of demonstrating this Assessment Objective. However, candidates need to be cautious about this, remembering throughout that one director's interpretation will, by definition, be personal and partial and may ignore or omit parts of a script that do not suit the director's view. Candidates who have focused on one particular production rather than their own close reading of the whole text as prescribed can disadvantage themselves because they accept too readily that what they have seen is only one possible reading of the text.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Shakespeare

Question 1

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Hamlet*

- (a) Almost all of the responses focused on the relationship between Gertrude and Hamlet, as required. Some were able to widen the scope of the question to argue that this central relationship has also soured Hamlet's dealings with Ophelia. A number of candidates misattributed the quotation to the closet scene, claiming that Hamlet said it directly to Gertrude rather than recognising its implication in his first soliloquy and seeing therefore that it informs our opinions from early in the play. Better answers explored Gertrude's early behaviour and the dramatic portrayal of her alliance with Claudius, particularly when the two first appear, and then explored possible contrasts after Act 3, Scene 4, paying particular attention to her 'choices' in Act 5, Scene 2, and evaluating how far she was able to assert herself as a mother rather than a wife.
- (b) In most answers, there was perceptive analysis and appreciation of the way that the passage works dramatically as an introduction to the play. Better candidates were able to contextualise the evident tension and unease amongst the guards here, linking it with both the change of ruler in Denmark and the impending dynastic changes in Elizabethan England. A few responses alluded to the external threat of possible invasion by Fortinbras; some argued that the threat comes from inside the castle, not outside. Better responses engaged with the dramatic change in perspective on Horatio's part, and some responses able to make very effective links between Horatio's shift from scepticism to belief here, and Hamlet's ongoing uncertainty as to the true nature and purpose of the ghost. There were some very good answers exploring the way that the atmosphere of uncertainty and the continuing asking of questions is typical of the play as a whole.

Question 2

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *The Merchant of Venice*

- (a) Candidates warmed quickly to this question. Most focused on the various ways in which Shylock is treated by the other characters. Some argued, too, that Venice is institutionally prejudiced, with the law itself manipulable and favouring the Christians. More subtle answers often explored Shylock's deep-seated prejudice and distrust of the Christians in the play, particularly after Jessica elopes with Lorenzo. These responses noted that his resentment has a clear cause, and they often displayed sympathy for Shylock and an ability to see the action from his point of view: he gives what he gets. Many responses saw parallels with Belmont, remarking on Portia's prejudices about her suitors and the various ways in which she loads the casket game so she gets the outcome she wants. Some of the most subtle responses drew both sides of the play's action together by focusing on the trial scene, exploring how the Court is weighed against Shylock and the irony of the hypocritical attention afforded to 'mercy' when it suits Venice and the Christians, but is then not

extended to Shylock after the judgement. The best answers were able to argue the case chosen in detail, making clear reference to the exact terms that are used towards Shylock. There were some interesting responses that took as their focus the limitations imposed by gender, exploring and comparing the restrictions and prejudices faced by Portia and Jessica as victims of their fathers' instruction or more generally by demonstrating that Portia is taken more seriously when she adopts the costume, manner and language of men.

- (b) This question seemed to take many candidates by surprise, and many simply resorted to giving a plot summary or sketch of the relationship between Jessica and Lorenzo. Few seemed willing to discuss how this is the only moment where unequivocal love between characters is shown, with the elevated vocabulary of the moon and classical mythology reflecting real emotion, whereas the over-blown love speeches of Bassanio earlier on can also be interpreted as the manipulations of a 'gold-digger'. The best responses, of course, saw the scene as establishing a tranquil mood of reconciliation for the major characters. Some explored the role of music in the play as a whole, contrasting Jessica's melancholic response to Shylock's earlier view that music is a dangerous temptation and, indeed, has been used by Portia elsewhere in order to ensure that she hooks Bassanio. The best answers also placed the extract in the context of the play, seeing that the homecoming of Portia and Nerissa re-establishes the tone as one of comedy and reconciliation, thus ensuring that the ring test which follows is seen more as a comic twist by the audience, than as a deep test of Bassanio and Gratiano's faithfulness.

Section B: Drama

Question 3

ATHOL FUGARD: *The Train Driver and Other Plays*

- (a) The responses ranged across the three plays, indicating that candidates were comfortable working on all of them to illustrate the theme of oppression. Reference was made to several scenes from each play. Focus was mainly on context and setting as candidates worked through their views on apartheid and the effects on the characters. Better responses often spoke about the idea of self-oppression that characters like Roelf impose on themselves. Less able responses, despite working on the three plays, adopted a narrative approach and did not use specific scenes for critical analysis. In addition to exploring the sufferings imposed on Veronica by poverty and AIDS, or the suicidal despair of Red Doek, or the anti-Semitism experienced by Solly and Rachel, the best responses considered the means by which characters fought to overcome oppression, and the potential evidence of hope in each play, weighing up whether Roelf's ability to understand and forgive Red Doek is negated by his murder, or whether Henry's arrival at understanding and even love for the other characters at the diner, can compensate the audience for its closure and their disappearance.
- (b) Weaker answers to this question simply reported on what is said in the passage, without responding to the instruction to consider dialogue as a dramatic method. Better responses noted that both monologue and dialogue give characters opportunities for self-evaluation or for exploration of memories. Some responses acutely noted that Fugard occasionally uses memories of other conversations as a means of creating the past dramatically. The best responses were able to link the passage to moments in the other plays, perhaps engaging with Roelf's changing attitude towards Red Doek, achieved through dialogue with Simon in *The Train Driver*, or with the self-realisation that comes to Henry during his conversations with Adela, Solly and Rachel in *Have You Seen Us*.

Question 4

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

- (a) At the lower end of performance, a number of candidates simply suggested that the play is autobiographical and charted the relationship between the two brothers as though they were real people. Better answers, of course, responded to the instruction to explore the dramatic effects. They noted that the brothers show affection for each other, and that James Tyrone Jr. (Jamie) supports his brother in conversations with their father. Some responses also dealt with the brothers' jealousy of each other in relation to their mother's affections. Other responses looked at the very different ways in which the brothers deal with their mother's decline during the play. A number of responses touched on the way that O'Neill portrays them very much as their parents'

children, each of them having different characteristics that are explored elsewhere in the portrayal of Tyrone and Mary. The best answers also explored Edmund's toughness and independence both outside and inside the home, contrasting it to Jamie's persistence in seeing him as his vulnerable 'kid' brother.

- (b) A number of responses simply gave an account of the scene. Better answers moved beyond the passage itself, to explore the difficult relationships between the family members elsewhere in the play, and the ways in which affection is never entirely absent, together with the misunderstanding and resentment. Responses tended to view Tyrone very unsympathetically, focusing on his desire to deny any genetic responsibility for Edmund's 'tuberculosis' and his readiness to scrimp on possible treatment, and paying no heed to any evidence of his early poverty. They also used that denial to explore similarities between Edmund and Mary. Responses tended to explore evidence of Jamie's protective love for his brother, the hostility between father and son and the refusal of either one to try to understand the other. All responses were able to explore the evidence of Mary's relapse in the passage, and the better ones recognised the symbolic links with the onset of fog. Some answers were also able to recognise the irony of Tyrone's obsession with property while being unable to provide his wife with 'a real home'. Many responses – rightly – made extensive use of the stage directions to demonstrate how the drama works.

Question 5

SHELAGH STEPHENSON: *An Experiment with an Air Pump*

- (a) At the lower end, candidates were able to give an account of the relationship between the two characters, exploring some of the difficulties in their marriage in terms of gender roles at the time. Many responses saw the two as dramatised embodiments of the arts/science discussion in the play. Not many answers dealt in detail, however, with the moment in Act 2, Scene 3 where Fenwick and Susannah actually talk about their relationship and its limitations. Many answers made connection with the obviously more equal modern dealings between Tom and Ellen as a means of demonstrating how the balance has shifted between the genders. The best answers recognised the unhappiness and frustration of Susannah as an eighteenth-century woman but acknowledged that she and Fenwick move towards a better understanding, just as Ellen and Tom do.
- (b) Some candidates focused entirely on the passage, with no mention of the rest of the play or the dual time scheme. Better responses focused on the disparaging dismissal of the play by the audience onstage, and the ways in which Harriet's thwarted ambitions will be realised by Kate. They engaged with the symbolism (for example, Britannia, the sheep) evident in the play and the respective roles of Harriet representing industry and progress, with Maria presenting the lost ideals of the pastoral, and Isobel as the sacrificial lamb. There was often exploration of how far Maria and Isobel would go on to challenge or justify those roles elsewhere in the play, with Isobel's bitter comment 'it's just an exercise in humiliation' perhaps demonstrating her consciousness of class and of the others' patronising attitudes towards her.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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

Key messages

- Examiners noted that many of the candidates who wrote rather less actually provided better responses.
- Responses to **(a)**-type questions were greatly improved by reference to particular moments in the play, especially when supported by quotations.
- Candidates who demonstrated that they had thought hard about the genre of the text and its implications do better than those responding to the play as a text to be read. This was particularly true for candidates responding to **(b)**-type questions

General comments

Please note that Paper 31 is taken by a very restricted number of candidates in this session. It follows therefore that examiners may not have seen answers at all levels on all texts.

This paper is now very well-established, so most of what follows in terms of general comments will be familiar to readers.

Some candidates could usefully give more attention to how the questions are structured. A question often begins with 'In what ways', an instruction that allows access for all candidates, even those who only present a fairly narrative account in order to make their points. The key discriminator comes with the words 'and with what dramatic effects', or some related formulation, which points to the need to discuss particular moments with attention to language, form and action in order to demonstrate a close understanding of how a writer creates meaning. Some candidates omit or rarely mention the writer's name and thus give no sense that there is a mind behind the text which is shaping our response to the drama. Perhaps the easiest way to illustrate this is with reference to punctuation. Many candidates refer to this as a 'way' in which a writer creates meaning, but it is only by pointing out that an ellipsis in the printed text creates (perhaps) tension between characters when on stage that the observation becomes valid as a part of 'dramatic presentation'. On a drama paper, there is usually something to be made of the stage directions, particularly when a question asks about dramatic effects. As with discussions about punctuation, points need to be validated by a demonstration of how the stage direction, enacted, will create meaning in terms of either character or theme.

Whilst essay plans are neither read nor rewarded by examiners, candidates are often well served by having some sense of how they are going to structure and present their ideas. At lower levels the plot of a text sometimes serves for a structure, but such responses are generally limited. With **(b)**-type questions, a line-by-line approach is sometimes used. This too has its limitations, as the candidate often then fails to take a view of the whole, a strategic view of the dramatic arc that is presented. Better answers will indicate a sense of an argument from the beginning, laying out a clear sense of direction. It is worth reminding candidates that assessment of this subject is partly an assessment of writing ability (**Assessment Objective 4 Communication**). It follows, therefore, that less is often better than more because it suggests an ability to select what is truly germane to a question. Some candidates write a lot, and this is often counter-productive because it suggests to the examiner that conciseness of thought and expression is not being truly valued. Some candidates could usefully spend time when preparing for the examination in refining their essay technique, making more use of discourse markers to demonstrate their ability to construct an argument, not just make a series of points. There are, of course, lengthy essays of the highest quality – but the majority of really long essays simply penalise themselves because they fail to focus sufficiently on the question.

Reports on this paper have often mentioned the difference between 'context' and background information. In stronger responses, contexts are integrated, to form part of the candidate's argument, not a bolt-on extra. Biographical information about a writer, tempting as it is to provide, tends to be irrelevant in most cases.

Candidates need to be careful, too, about asserting things that may or may not be true. For example, assertions about how women were 'always' subservient in Elizabethan/Jacobean times would have been news to both Queen Elizabeth I and Shakespeare's Cleopatra. Contexts need to be used with caution and only when relevant to a candidate's developing thinking about the question asked.

As noted previously in reports, candidates are not always secure in including the opinions of others (**Assessment Objective 5 Evaluation of opinion**). Sometimes examiners take it that this element is implicitly covered because a candidate is arguing a particular line with conviction, perhaps showing that other views have been considered and then dismissed. However, candidates are advised to be explicit. One way of doing so is simply to note that a scene of issue could be differently considered. Confident candidates are often explicit about another view in order to either disagree or reinforce their own arguments. Theatre productions and films are both, of course, a perfectly legitimate way of demonstrating this Assessment Objective. However, candidates need to be cautious about this, remembering throughout that one director's interpretation will, by definition, be personal and partial and may ignore or omit parts of a script that do not suit the director's view. Candidates who have focused on one particular production rather than their own close reading of the whole text as prescribed can disadvantage themselves because they accept too readily that what they have seen is only one possible reading of the text.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Shakespeare

Question 1

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Hamlet*

- (a) Most responses to this question associated Denmark's 'rotteness' primarily with Claudius, seeing Denmark and the King as synonymous. More limited responses tended to dwell exclusively on his murder of King Hamlet and attempted murder of Hamlet. Fuller responses looked beyond him to the atmosphere of surveillance and suspicion at court, sometimes mentioning Polonius and his family, and the evidence of corruption in the family dynamic there which is a consequence of the overall depravity of the country. Responses often mentioned the breakdown of conventional relationships such as the friendship between Hamlet, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and Hamlet's relationships with women, focusing on Gertrude and Ophelia. Some of the most successful responses linked the corruption in Denmark with the looming dynastic crisis at the end of Elizabeth I's reign, with Fortinbras seen as the potential saviour of Denmark. Strangely, very few thought to focus ideas of 'rotteness' on Hamlet's inner world, in spite of the fact that he is also victim of the corruption.
- (b) Candidates recognised this extract from Act 5, Scene 2 as the moment when Hamlet has his revenge. Most maintained that Hamlet has converted himself into a man of action, a man more like Laertes, who has no taste for second thoughts. Only the best candidates seemed aware that Hamlet has not actually changed: he knows that he is about to die because of the poison, and so is seizing his last chance. Thus, the dramatic situation here is more complex than many candidates recognised. Ironically, having plotted his revenge so thoroughly, Hamlet is reduced to spontaneity as the action descends into chaos, with the role of the heroic revenger buried amongst the increasing pile of corpses. As Horatio notes later, these are 'casual slaughters', which deprive Hamlet of the triumph of being the tragic hero that he has angled for throughout the play. The plotting is done by others who then find themselves its victim – Claudius and Gertrude fall victims to their own plots ('purposes mistook/Fall'n on th'inventors' heads', to quote Horatio again) – not to something planned by Hamlet. Candidates who offered a close reading of what is actually going on did best; at the lower end, some candidates simply adopted a linear approach and did not really seem aware of the complexity of even the most basic action of the scene.

Question 2

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *The Merchant of Venice*

- (a) Most responses were confident about the relationship between Shylock and Antonio and there was often considerable detail explored about why Shylock feels such resentment. There was often useful discussion of Shylock's visceral dislike of Christians and his wish for revenge because they have deprived him of his daughter. More sophisticated responses were able to widen out the

discussion and argue that Shylock is victim of institutionalised and state approved prejudice by Christians, even to the extent that the legal process can be openly swayed against him. Much was made – rightly – of Shylock’s ‘Hath not a Jew eyes?’ speech where he eviscerates the Christians for their lack of humanity. Many responses saw the irony of the talk about mercy in the trial scene that then turns to open revenge on Shylock, not merely in terms of his money but by the gratuitous forced conversion of Shylock to Christianity, with Gratiano’s spiteful final remark that ‘Had I been judge, thou shouldst have had ten more [god-fathers]/To bring thee to the gallows, not to the font.’ There was often useful contextual discussion of ant-Semitism in Shakespeare’s time.

- (b) Most responses saw this extract from Act 1, Scene 2 as a means to explore evidence of Portia’s ‘racism’ elsewhere in her attitude to the Prince of Morrocco, as well as her obvious favouring of Bassanio. Better responses contrasted Portia’s wit and intelligence here with the strictures imposed on her by her father. They explored the way that she is able to manipulate her circumstances and encourage Bassanio to make the right choice later in the play, referencing the song, and then exercising her talents by disguising herself as Balthasar. The best responses were able to focus on her ability to analyse a situation and manipulate it for her own advantage, thus noticing that she, like many others in the play, is involved in almost commercial decisions as she evaluates her own motivations and marketability. Thus, the scene could be interpreted as illuminating many of the themes present in Venice, with Belmont simply viewed as a place where the bargaining is slightly less explicit. Many candidates argued that Portia’s response here is a natural reaction to her being forced to choose a husband by a method not of her own making. More schematic responses saw this as a response to the patriarchy and discussed at length the role of women at the time. Portia makes little of this, and responses should have taken it as a hint that the casket scene is a given of the play, not really a trigger for lengthy discussions of this type.

Section B: Drama

Question 3

ATHOL FUGARD: *The Train Driver and Other Plays*

- (a) The links between past and present were clear to all candidates who responded to this question. They were able to see that the characters in these plays are driven by past experience to remorse, self-knowledge and an understanding of the world around them. Better responses were able to see that this is achieved through dialogue, monologue and dramatic situation. There were very few answers to the question, and none of them really tussled with ‘dramatic effects.’
- (b) Responses took a sympathetic view of the characters in these plays and the troubles that they have to confront. Most were able to offer a clear account of what is happening at this point in *Coming Home*. A number of responses simply dealt with the scene and then offered examples from the other plays, thus in a sense providing three linked essays rather than an overview of the whole topic. The best answers were able to integrate points by examining, for example, the stage directions in this scene and then linking them to Fugard’s stage directions elsewhere. The best responses were able to see how Fugard uses confrontation to challenge existing attitudes and facilitate greater understanding either between characters or within the characters themselves. This can be seen in this passage, where Veronica confronts Alfred’s fear of AIDS. Within *The Train Driver*, Roelf is confronted by the realities of how someone like Simon lives. He learns to change his own attitude to Red Doek, coming to a better understanding not only of the world around him, but also of himself.

Question 4

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

- (a) As might be expected, most responses focused on Tyrone and his reluctance to spend money. Candidates understood that his background has made him the way that he is. There was much focus on moments when money is the subject of conversations. Better responses were able to see the way that money links to the attitudes that different characters have towards each other. The best responses were able to provide a nuanced discussion of the prompt in the question, noting that his poverty in youth has meant that he is now incapable of overriding this habit of carefulness, even when it goes against his current needs and desires.

- (b) The best responses analysed O'Neill's dramatic methods and stagecraft, including the interplay of dialogue, tone, and symbolism. They explored Mary's fragmented monologue, connecting her nostalgic yearning and religious delusions to themes of denial and loss. There was often useful discussion of Mary's dreaminess, her wandering interruptions of her own speeches. These responses also connected the extract to the broader text. Less successful answers faltered due to a lack of textual specificity and limited discussion of familial dynamics. Some ignored Mary's monologue and focused on a description of the role addiction – either morphine or alcohol – has in shaping the relationships of the characters in the play as a whole, rather than applying these views to the text presented. Very few candidates engaged with Jamie's recital of a poem as a means of summarising the men's views of Mary, though reference to apposite literary texts is, of course, frequent and significant throughout the play. The scene is the end of the play, something which very few commented upon, despite it being an obvious way into the extract as it is designed to summarise the action and show the characters stuck in an eternal circle of self-pity and mutual emotional destruction. Nothing has changed.

Question 5

SHELAGH STEPHENSON: *An Experiment with an Air Pump*

- (a) At the lower end of the scale, responses tended to work their way through the male characters in order of appearance, commenting on their roles in the play's overall structure. Many responses focused on Armstrong and what he represents in terms of science unfettered by ethics. Better responses were able to consider and contrast the male characters both in terms of where they appeared to stand in the ethical debate and in terms of the two time periods dramatised. The fullest and most coherent responses approached the question as being fundamentally about masculinity in general (as opposed to individual men) and considered values and eras to be among the contributory factors that combined with others to shape Stephenson's presentation of ideas about gender. The best responses made considerable reference to particular moments in the play, often contrasting the men's behaviour with that of the women.
- (b) Most candidates wrote very well on the contrasts between the two timelines, though some wrote only about the passage, without linking it to the rest of the play. Most responses demonstrated good understanding of the ways in which Isobel's body serves as both a symbolic and literal link between the two time frames and as a vehicle for revealing the different attitudes and personalities of the characters, particularly their ruthlessness or their moral scruples. Virtually all candidates were able to explore contrasts both between the characters in their own time and across the two periods, focusing particularly on Tom and Armstrong as contrasting characters, and Kate and Armstrong, and Ellen and Roget as comparable characters. There was much discussion of the symbolic significance of the shuttlecock as a visual representation of the verbal exchanges between Roget and Armstrong.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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

Key messages

- Planning is a useful and effective tool when used strategically to structure and focus an answer.
- Analysis should always refer to the effects of form, structure and language rather than focus on devices and technical terminology without a sense of the context in which they are being used and their effect on the reader.
- Knowledge and understanding of the texts are the foundations on which a successful essay is based and candidates should recognise that AO1 and selection of textual detail is key.

General comments

This paper was taken by a small number of candidates this session so Examiners may not have seen answers at all levels on all texts.

Rubric infringements, while fewer in number than in previous years, are still seen by Examiners and when this happens it is obviously damaging to outcomes for each candidate affected. The paper requires candidates to answer one question from **Section A** and one from **Section B**. **One answer must be on a poetry text and the other answer must be on a prose text.**

Although candidates' planning is not read or marked by Examiners, planning is very useful to candidates in considering how they will structure their argument, use the material they plan to include and ensure coverage of the assessment objectives. Planning is personal to each candidate and is a process that should be developed throughout their study for the 9695 course rather than as an activity purely used in exams. Planning helps to avoid false starts (candidates attempting one option and abandoning the attempt after realising they prefer the other option), steadies the mind and offers an aide memoire for the candidate to use as they progress through their answers. Examiners see the evidence of good planning in focused answers that demonstrate progression of ideas with development of arguments and relevant, well-integrated support. Some candidates approach **(b)** answers by working through the extract provided line-by-line. This is not very helpful in enabling them to consider the whole extract, its structure and significance. Candidates planning for **(b)** answers should consider the presentation and significance of the extract as a whole and how the detail supports this in the context of the wider work. The best answers take a strategic view from the beginning, clearly indicating their plan and direction for the response in a relevant introduction. It is fine to diverge into an additional area of relevant interest or add details as the answer unfolds but a robust opening makes for a secure foundation. General introductions and 'catch all' comments do not support achievement.

Examiners saw some very impressive analysis this series. The best answers focused their approach on ways in which writers create effects using language, form and structure with some relevant and accurate inclusion of technical terminology and evidence of thoughtful and original insight into how these effects contribute to the meaning and purpose of the studied work. Good answers keep the writer in view, referring to them throughout (by surname) and ensuring that a sense of writer's intent is foregrounded. In a response on *Beloved*, for example, a candidate wrote, 'Morrison's implementation of a fragmented narrative enables readers to form a view of Baby Suggs and the impact she has in the novel's action.' The identification of an effect should then be explained and illustrated with an example from the text. Some candidates restrict themselves to a broad-brush approach, referring to 'diction' or 'words' linked to a generic effect and sometimes lacking exemplification of any kind. The more specific a point, the more impact it is likely to have. General comments such as, 'Diction is used to present the character of Baby Suggs' with little or no supporting reference have been seen by Examiners and are not an effective approach. Similarly, clumping phrases together with an overarching reference to an effect does not constitute the kind of analysis required for AO2. Some candidates are still unhelpfully name-dropping technical terminology without understanding the meaning of the terms or linking them to examples from the text.

Knowledge and understanding of the texts studied underpin success at A level. It is essential that candidates know and understand their prose and poetry texts very well and recognise the significance of genre, an aspect of literary context. Knowledge should not be restricted to plot and individual characters. Themes, context, interaction between characters and methods deployed by the writer are all useful knowledge. If writing about a specific poem for the **(b)** option, it is essential to consider it in the wider context of the selection or collection chosen. A level study requires an awareness of how the given poem is characteristic of the poet's work so simply writing about the given poem does not meet the brief for these questions. The majority of the answer must deal with the text on the page, but without contextualisation and reference to other poems, this does not fulfil the demands of the question or mark scheme. Use of integrated support through quotations and references to particular effects and episodes is important in demonstrating strong knowledge and understanding. Contextual knowledge is not the same as background knowledge and it is important that candidates are aware of how to use this knowledge to best effect. Sometimes contextual knowledge is very shaky indeed with Examiners reporting examples of errors such as reference to Chaucer as 'a Victorian' and Toni Morrison 'writing in the 1860s'. Points of context must be linked to the question and wider argument.

Examiners report seeing much improvement in the application of AO5, evaluation of opinions of others. Some effective use of varying arguments, different critical views and theoretical concepts has been seen. Moreover, these are more purposefully integrated throughout answers rather than appearing as an 'add on' at the end of a response. While this is encouraging, there are still many answers reflecting no inclusion of AO5 at all or paying scant attention to it. This objective is a key component of the A level specification, and it is important that candidates address it in some way.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

JANE AUSTEN: *Pride and Prejudice*

- (a)** This question attracted a few responses with most candidates tending to track through Elizabeth's three main relationships with Collins, Wickham and Darcy. Some considered Elizabeth's character development in relation to her mistaken first impressions of Darcy and Wickham with the best of these exploring the structure of the novel as a means of demonstrating how Austen shapes a reader's response to her. Moderately successful candidates were able to refer to specific episodes as examples for their arguments and the better of these included direct quotation from the text. These responses often included relevant detail of context including reference to the social and financial pressures on women at the time to marry and to 'marry well'. Less successful answers tended to be general and descriptive in approach, offering little in the way of analysis and supporting detail. Some tended to assert that Elizabeth steps outside of conventional expectations of regency womanhood in her refusal to marry for a comfortable home like Charlotte. The most successful answers took a strategic approach to the question, for example exploring the influence of Mr Bennet on Elizabeth and the closeness of their relationship based on their shared sense of humour and intelligence.
- (b)** This question was more popular than **1(a)** with the most successful candidates picking up on the pomposity of Collins's language and his self-righteousness as a clergyman, alongside his obsequious attitude to Lady Catherine. Only one or two answers successfully demonstrated the ability to engage with wider reference with one or two answers exploring the full extent of the ironic implications of the passage, Mr Bennet's sarcasm, Mrs Bennet's hysteria and the issue of inheritance that provides the most significant context here. Some discussed Mrs Bennet's hostility towards Collins but missed opportunities to comment on her later insistence that Elizabeth accept his proposal. Moderately successful responses were able to detect elements of the irony in the passage and selected appropriate examples of language, form and structure to analyse. Some of these struggled to go beyond Austen's choices of diction, although a few did refer to her use of free indirect discourse and aspects of style in the wider text. Some began to unpick the pompous, overbearing tone of the letter, focusing mainly on the letter itself and not discussing the full ironic implications of the wider passage. Less successful responses often lacked any awareness of the irony in the passage and misunderstood its meaning, considering it to present Collins in a positive light.

Question 2

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

- (a) This question was very popular, and many answers were seen across the achievement range. The question required candidates to discuss the significance of Chaucer's presentation of Pluto and Proserpina to the tale. Many answers opened with the assertion of Fate versus Free Will as the main issue, but did not discuss how this aspect is supported by the text or relate it clearly to the question in most cases. The least successful answers offered brief, undeveloped and general discussions of ways in which Pluto and Proserpina influence the plot and themes of the tale, with a significant number featuring insecure basic knowledge such as confusing Januarie with Chaucer or the Merchant. Some referred to pagan mythology with varying degrees of relevance and accuracy. Stronger responses referred to specific details and drew on parallels between Januarie and May and Pluto and Proserpina. Some extended the allegorical dimensions of their response by referring to ways in which May and Damyan's actions are a representation of Adam and Eve. Some of these answers considered the nature of the fabliau genre with varying degrees of insight. The best answers considered how Pluto and Proserpina are juxtaposed to Januarie and May, in their age difference and the lack of agency common to both Proserpina and May in marrying Pluto and Januarie. One particularly strong response considered the complexity of marriage, even for gods and goddesses, drawing contrasts between Proserpina's ability to argue with Pluto (their dialogue in the garden) and May's passive demeanour on her wedding night with Januarie.
- (b) This question was less popular than 2(a) and responses tended to meet criteria for Levels 2 and 3. The least successful answers tended to paraphrase the extract with little or no reference to context or details from the wider text. Some had partial understanding of Chaucer's methods and intentions but lacked confidence in developing these ideas in any detail. Some strayed away from the passage, resorting to discussion of plot or extended consideration of the advice given by Justinus and Placebo, including Januarie's response to it. Some missed the irony of Januarie expecting to experience 'hevene and erthe' and then not reaching heaven when he dies. Better answers moved from some handling of the passage to useful explorations of Januarie's true motives behind the rhetoric with some straightforward and competent discussion of his hypocrisy.

Question 3

JOHN DONNE: *Selected Poems*

- (a) There were insufficient answers to this question to comment on the performance of candidates.
- (b) There were very few answers to this question. These tended to be done well and offered close analysis of the poem with reference to wider work and social, cultural and historical context. One good answer referred to the literary context of *Holy Sonnets* and considered the special nature of the sonnet form as part of their response. Another strong response connected the theatrical imagery to Shakespeare's 'All the world's a stage' effectively. Most answers to this question offered informed personal response and focused analysis of effects.

Question 4

THOMAS HARDY: *Far from the Madding Crowd*

- (a) There were insufficient answers to this question to comment on the performance of candidates.
- (b) There were insufficient answers to this question to comment on the performance of candidates.

Question 5

BRAM STOKER: *Dracula*

- (a) This was a popular question and candidates at all levels of achievement were able to engage with the idea of Stoker's presentation of Count Dracula as 'evil, but also dangerously attractive'. Most candidates were able to pursue the premise throughout their answers, allowing them to make cohesive arguments. Personal response was seen by Examiners in all answers to this question. The least successful tended to be unsupported and assertive regarding Dracula's demonic

appearance and nature. Better answers offered deeper insights into Dracula's representation and formed compelling arguments about the attraction of evil. Some explored the novel's attitudes to female sexuality and the influence of Victorian society, religion and morals while others considered the possible influence of homo eroticism in their discussions. Feminist critiques were seen regularly as a means of evaluating perspectives with the best of these considering Lucy's victimhood. Some wrote of her 'dark desires' and the nature of consent in her liaison with Dracula. The best responses approached the question with a range of ideas and supported with evidence from across the text, using subtle insights to pursue original and insightful arguments about Stoker's presentation of the Count and the responses of others to him. Some included the literary context of gothic fiction to convey a broader, more nuanced view.

- (b) This answer was less popular than the **5(a)** answer but still attracted a range of answers. Most responses considered Stoker's epistolary style and commented on the use of 'MINA MURRAY'S JOURNAL' and the significance of her perspective both here and in the novel as a whole. Weaker answers tracked through the passage, picking out details relating to aspects such as the storm and description of the waves but some missed opportunities to comment on key features such as the significance of the uncommon action of the dog barking, 'furious and now in terror'. Better answers selected appropriately from the text and analysed examples of language, form and structure with the wider text in view. They commented on how the reader sees Lucy through Mina's account and how this conveys her essentially good nature and the disintegration of her state of mind. The best answers considered the structure of the extract and its place in the wider novel, some exploring ways in which it marks a narrative shift and acceleration in the tension and creation of an epic atmosphere through the use of pathetic fallacy and setting.

Question 6

WALT WHITMAN: Selected Poems from *Leaves of Grass*

- (a) There were insufficient answers to this question to comment on the performance of candidates.
- (b) There were insufficient answers to this question to comment on the performance of candidates.

SECTION B

Question 7

SUJATA BHATT: Selected Poems from *Point No Point*

- (a) This question was answered by several candidates. Responses tended to be quite good at discussing the poems separately but often did not link them in terms of ways in which they reflect overarching themes of human connection throughout the series of poems. One candidate discussing 'Genealogy' commented on the obvious connections between parents and child but noted that there is also a 'longing for connection after death'. The most effective responses developed purposeful and well-supported insights with the question clearly in view.
- (b) There were several responses to this question on *What Happened to the Elephant?* Responses tended to be in Level 2 or Level 3 with the weakest being descriptive. Some answers were based on what appeared to be pre-prepared arguments on Bhatt, focusing on refugee and outsider status. These arguments were uncomfortably 'shoehorned' into interpretations of the poem with some weak understanding of Bhatt's concerns. Most answers took a literal view of the poem with little evidence of analysis and personal interpretation.

Question 8

LOUISE GLÜCK: Selected Poems from *The Wild Iris*

- (a) There were insufficient answers to this question to comment on the performance of candidates.
- (b) This question on *Vespers* attracted a number of answers with some sound interpretation of the poem but inconsistent reference to the wider selection or context in which the poem was written. The least successful answers demonstrated little or no awareness of the context of the poem, for example assuming that the poet was addressing a lover. Straightforward responses discussed the

poem in terms of a loss of faith. Better answers began to explore the nuanced nature of Glück's relationship with the Creator and how that encompasses doubt, even hope, as well as loss of faith.

Question 9

JAMES JOYCE: *Dubliners*

- (a) There were insufficient answers to this question to comment on the performance of candidates.
- (b) There were insufficient answers to this question to comment on the performance of candidates.

Question 10

TONI MORRISON: *Beloved*

- (a) This text was the most popular on **Section B**. While this question on female strength and resilience attracted a large number of answers, it was not as popular as the **(b)** option. Less successful answers working at Level 2 and low Level 3 tended to rely on narration or description, often selecting incidents from the novel where strength and resilience are shown by women and recounting these with varying levels of detail. Some featured repetition, highlighting the importance of planning a structured response. Straightforward accounts of Sethe's experience were sometimes accompanied by focus on Baby Suggs's suffering and survival. Better answers showed sound knowledge of the text, incorporating characters such as Denver and Amy. Some considered the complexity of Denver's journey through the novel. The best answers began to discuss female experience through the novel's style and structure, considering how Morrison's narrative is shaped in terms of traumatic cycles rather than linear suffering and recovery.
- (b) This was the most popular question in **Section B** and a full range of achievement was seen by Examiners. Less successful answers tracked through the scene, describing some of the effects with varying accuracy and detail. Better answers highlighted *Beloved*'s other worldly qualities such as 'her touch no lighter than a feather', offered often insightful analysis of the effects of the passage with many focusing on *Beloved*'s question about the diamonds. It was pleasing to see most candidates dealing appropriately with *Beloved*'s wider representational significance in terms of trauma and the past. An example of this referred to how *Beloved* had become 'a symbol of Sethe's past continuing to haunt her' while another commented on the 'parasitic tendencies the past has on Sethe's life'.

Better responses picked up on the unearthly qualities of *Beloved* – 'her touch, no heavier than a feather' and her uncanny knowledge of Sethe's diamonds. Her parasitic qualities of feeding upon Sethe were noted here and developed in those who made wider reference to the novel.

Question 11

JEAN RHYS: *Wide Sargasso Sea*

- (a) There were insufficient answers to this question to comment on the performance of candidates.
- (b) There were insufficient answers to this question to comment on the performance of candidates.

Question 12

NATASHA TRETHEWEY: *Native Guard*

- (a) There were insufficient answers to this question to comment on the performance of candidates.
- (b) There were insufficient answers to this question to comment on the performance of candidates.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

<p>Paper 9695/42 Pre- and Post-1900 Poetry and Prose</p>

Key messages

- Planning is a useful and effective tool when used strategically to structure and focus an answer.
- Analysis should always refer to the effects of form, structure and language rather than focus on devices and technical terminology without a sense of the context in which they are being used and effect on the reader.
- Knowledge and understanding of the texts are the foundations on which a successful essay is based and candidates should recognise that AO1 and selection of textual detail is key.

General comments

Rubric infringements, while fewer in number than in previous years, are still seen by Examiners and when this happens it is obviously damaging to outcomes for each candidate affected. The paper requires candidates to answer one question from **Section A** and one from **Section B**. **One answer must be on a poetry text and the other answer must be on a prose text.**

Although candidates' planning is not read or marked by Examiners, planning is very useful to candidates in considering how they will structure their argument, use the material they plan to include and ensure coverage of the assessment objectives. Planning is personal to each candidate and is a process that should be developed throughout their study for the 9695 course rather than as an activity purely used in exams. Planning helps to avoid false starts (candidates attempting one option and abandoning the attempt after realising they prefer the other option), steadies the mind and offers an aide memoire for the candidate to use as they progress through their answers. Examiners see the evidence of good planning in focused answers that demonstrate progression of ideas with development of arguments and relevant, well-integrated support. Some candidates approach **(b)** answers by working through the extract provided line-by-line. This is not very helpful in enabling them to consider the whole extract, its structure and significance. Candidates planning for **(b)** answers should consider the presentation and significance of the extract as a whole and how the detail supports this in the context of the wider work. The best answers take a strategic view from the beginning, clearly indicating their plan and direction for the response in a relevant introduction. It is fine to diverge into an additional area of relevant interest or add details as the answer unfolds but a robust opening makes for a secure foundation. General introductions and 'catch all' comments do not support achievement.

Examiners saw some very impressive analysis this series. The best answers focused their approach on ways in which writers create effects using language, form and structure with some relevant and accurate inclusion of technical terminology and evidence of thoughtful and original insight into how these effects contribute to the meaning and purpose of the studied work. Good answers keep the writer in view, referring to them throughout (by surname) and ensuring that a sense of writer's intent is foregrounded. In a response on *Beloved*, for example, a candidate wrote, 'Morrison's implementation of a fragmented narrative enables readers to form a view of Baby Suggs and the impact she has in the novel's action.' The identification of an effect should then be explained and illustrated with an example from the text. Some candidates restrict themselves to a broad-brush approach, referring to 'diction' or 'words' linked to a generic effect and sometimes lacking exemplification of any kind. The more specific a point, the more impact it is likely to have. General comments such as, 'Diction is used to present the character of Baby Suggs' with little or no supporting reference have been seen by Examiners and are not an effective approach. Similarly, clumping phrases together with an overarching reference to an effect does not constitute the kind of analysis required for AO2. Some candidates are still unhelpfully name-dropping technical terminology without understanding the meaning of the terms or linking them to examples from the text.

Knowledge and understanding of the texts studied underpin success at A level. It is essential that candidates know and understand their prose and poetry texts very well and recognise the significance of genre, an

aspect of literary context. Knowledge should not be restricted to plot and individual characters. Themes, context, interaction between characters and methods deployed by the writer are all useful knowledge. If writing about a specific poem for the **(b)** option, it is essential to consider it in the wider context of the selection or collection chosen. A level study requires an awareness of how the given poem is characteristic of the poet's work so simply writing about the given poem does not meet the brief for these questions. The majority of the answer must deal with the text on the page, but without contextualisation and reference to other poems, this does not fulfil the demands of the question or mark scheme. Use of integrated support through quotations and references to particular effects and episodes is important in demonstrating strong knowledge and understanding. Contextual knowledge is not the same as background knowledge and it is important that candidates are aware of how to use this knowledge to best effect. Sometimes contextual knowledge is very shaky indeed with Examiners reporting examples of errors such as reference to Chaucer as 'a Victorian' and Toni Morrison 'writing in the 1860s'. Points of context must be linked to the question and wider argument.

Examiners report seeing much improvement in the application of AO5, evaluation of opinions of others. Some effective use of varying arguments, different critical views and theoretical concepts has been seen. Moreover, these are more purposefully integrated throughout answers rather than appearing as an 'add on' at the end of a response. While this is encouraging, there are still many answers reflecting no inclusion of AO5 at all or paying scant attention to it. This objective is a key component of the A level specification, and it is important that candidates address it in some way.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

JANE AUSTEN: *Pride and Prejudice*

- (a)** This is a popular text on the paper, and this question attracted a fair number of answers with all levels of achievement seen. Stronger answers tended to use aspects of context to discuss the ways in which women in the novel are dependent on men for financial security and are compromised by economic powerlessness, thus shaping their attitudes. Some effective answers contrasted Charlotte's pragmatism in her approach to Mr Collins's proposal and its promise of a comfortable life with Elizabeth's independent spirit and honesty in her dealings with Mr Collins. Elizabeth's changing view of, and response to, Darcy was a focus for many with the best of these responses demonstrating close knowledge of the text and highlighting the visit to Pemberley as a turning point. One or two shrewdly argued that Elizabeth's dismissal of Collins even though he offered 'an answer to the entailment problem' contrasted ironically with her growing admiration of Darcy confirmed in, 'But I believe I must date it from my first seeing his beautiful grounds at Pemberley'. Others explored the character of Mrs Bennet as an extreme expression of ways in which women's attitudes to men were shaped by the expectations of society. Strong answers were able to provide relevant textual reference and supporting detail, demonstrating analytical insight into Austen's distinctive narrative style and effects. Some answers were a little heavy-handed in their reliance on women's attitudes to marriage, leading to broader approaches to the question. Less successful answers wrote generally about women's attitudes to love, offering character studies of each woman in the novel, including little on attitudes to men and relying on narration and assertion with little supporting detail.
- (b)** This was a popular question with all levels of achievement seen. Stronger candidates saw Lady Catherine as a satire on societal expectations. Some commented on how her interrogation of Elizabeth reveals the rigid rules of that period taken to an extreme, such as not allowing younger daughters to be 'out' until older ones are married and the hiring of a governess in families of any pretension to social standing. There were some interesting analytical approaches considering how Lady Catherine is designed as a caricature of 'social extremity in her pedantic emphasis on appropriate female deportment' referenced, for example, in her concerns about the need to 'play and sing'. In terms of context, some candidates made meaningful discussions relating to the nature and significance of entailment with some considering the wider implications of the social hierarchy. Perceptive responses looked at narrative methods such as the way Austen's views of Lady Catherine were vocalised through Elizabeth's via free indirect discourse and the use of dialogue. Candidates enjoyed showing how her ladyship's pride, superiority, self-importance, and

condescension are reflected in Austen's choice of language such as, 'dignified impertinence', and sentence structure and how these enable her to manipulate the tone and a reader's response to the character. There is a good deal of critical material available on this text and the best candidates made effective use of it to fulfil requirements for AO5. Wider reference to the text focused on the impact of Lady Catherine as a wealthy patron and aristocrat with better arguments relating this to Austen's narrative priorities. Less successful answers tended to track the passage, providing commentaries with little reference to the wider text. There was some reliance on narration and some misunderstanding of the relationship between Lady Catherine and Mrs Collins, with one or two candidates referring to her as her 'daughter-in-law'.

Question 2

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

- (a) This was a very popular question with candidates approaching responses in a range of ways. Most were able to chart the origins and reasons for May and Damyan's relationship with some support. Some relied on plot-driven narratives which tended to focus disproportionately on Januarie rather than the focus of the question, May and Damyan, with a few expressing sympathy for the cuckolded knight. Weaker answers provided little textual support for their arguments and relied on assertive personal response to form an argument. A fair number of answers offered arguments relevant to the question but did not analyse any detail of the text, leaving only presentation of character through function as a way into Chaucer's effects. Good answers brought in aspects of genre and form such as courtly love, fabliau and Chaucer's satire. Some perceptive responses explored ways in which the prologue foreshadows and prepares the reader for the unfolding events with effective use of supporting references. Strong answers were discriminating in their use of context and the range of possible interpretations of the tale. For example, there was discussion over the differing attitudes to May and Damyan between a contemporary audience and modern readers who might feel sympathy for May in having an affair. Some candidates cited attitudes to the age disparity between May and Januarie as a rationale for her relationship with Damyan, exploring her sexual frustration, Januarie's controlling behaviour and the context of the garden which one described as 'an ironically Edenic context for an illicit affair'.
- (b) This question was also popular but less so than the (a) option on this text. Some impressive answers were seen, embracing the symbolic and representational nature of Chaucer's imagery. A number of these good responses considered the use of intertextuality 'by referencing Genesis with Adam and Eve centrally placed as 'housbande' and 'wyf'. One strong answer discussed how 'the choice of diction belongs to the semantic field of a business transaction' while another argued that marriage 'is presented as a mercantile transaction of sorts'. Confident explorations were also seen on the use of direct speech and apostrophes. Wider links were convincingly made to the prologue and the previous debate between Justinus and Placebo. Critical interpretations were seen across most levels of achievement, the best well-integrated into arguments. Competent answers often attempted a commentary of the passage and concentrated on using knowledge of the plot to point out central ironies. Straightforward answers selected some detail and attempted analysis with varying success. Less successful answers struggled with the meaning of the passage and veered quickly into more narrative discussions. Some of these answers attempted to translate the passage with variable success but this approach leads to an insubstantial outcome in terms of the assessment objectives.

Question 3

JOHN DONNE: *Selected Poems*

- (a) There were insufficient answers to this question to comment on the performance of candidates.
- (b) This question on *The Flea* attracted a number of answers. The quality of these responses tended to be either at the lower or upper end of the mark scheme with little seen in the middle range of marks. Some confident discussions were seen based on the use of the flea to form an extreme argument to persuade a lover to sacrifice her virginity, including commentary on the use of religious language. Few answers did more than name drop other poems in the selection although some wrote authoritatively on Donne's characteristic use of the conceit. Some candidates were able to make convincing arguments about the nature of metaphysical poetry and how Donne's poetry encapsulates this style. Some mentioned the flea as a symbol of unity referencing the nature of the human soul and wider use of the sun and the globe elsewhere. *The Sun Rising* and *A Valediction:*

forbidding Mourning were most frequently mentioned poems by those who included wider reference. Weaker answers struggled to develop a progression of ideas and some of these relied on an almost overwhelming number of critical references without integrating them into arguments. This leads to fragmentation and confusion. It is important that candidates understand that critical views must be selected and used to evaluate rather than added for no specific reason. The least successful answers wrote as though this was the first time they had seen the poem and struggled to make a sensible argument.

Question 4

THOMAS HARDY: *Far from the Madding Crowd*

- (a) This was a popular question with work seen at all levels of achievement. Weaker responses appeared to lack detailed knowledge of the text and there was evidence of some reliance on a popular film version of the novel which emphasises the stir Bathsheba causes at the corn market. More generalised and assertive character studies seemed to be evident in weaker answers and some relied too heavily on narrative re-tellings of the plot. Perhaps surprisingly, candidates tended to be unsympathetic towards Hardy's presentation of Bathsheba. Some detailed aspects of social context and how unusual it was for a woman to inherit and run a farm were offered, but most saw her as an incapable farmer and a 'damsel in distress' figure whom Gabriel Oak has to rescue with little gratitude in return. Others struggled to balance the argument, either suggesting that Bathsheba is just as good as a man or that she is completely helpless. Better answers discussed her enthusiasm and willingness to participate in farm work, the respect most of her employees show her and her ultimate reliance on Gabriel Oak's help with mention of Troy. More successful answers emphasised Bathsheba's independence and were able to apply specific details such as how her income and farm were put at risk by her marriage to Troy. Good responses took a strategic view with some effectively challenging the novel's narrative voice. One successful answer adopted a post-structuralist perspective on the male point of view, suggesting that Hardy, by proxy, channels a reader's view of Bathsheba.
- (b) This question was not as popular as the (a) option on this text but nevertheless attracted a range of answers. Most candidates were able to place the passage in the context of the rumoured return of Troy. Some identified the rustics as a sort of Chorus, commenting on the potential harm of Troy 'dragging her to the dogs' while demonstrating a largely supportive, sympathetic attitude to Bathsheba. One comment on the function of the farm hands considered them as 'scrutinising the main characters and providing criticism that aligned with Victorian ideals'. Some noted the contrast created by the lone figure of Boldwood and saw his anguished words as a portent of the impending climax of the novel. There were also arguments relating to the 'comedic relief' provided by the extract and its role in creating tension in preparation for the novel's ending. Quite a few responses took the discussion of Boldwood directly into a narrative re-telling of the plot rather than using the focus on context and content to broaden discussion. The least successful responses were unable to move beyond a commentary of the extract with little reference to its significance to the wider text.

Question 5

BRAM STOKER: *Dracula*

- (a) This text was quite popular once again this series and Examiners saw responses at all levels of achievement. Candidates approached the theme of conflict in several different ways with good versus evil prominent in most responses. Other arguments covered East versus West, religion and superstition versus science and logic and also the idea of gender politics with Lucy and Mina challenging the power of the patriarchy and social expectations of women. Textual support was patchy in all but the most effective answers, but some moderately successful responses referred to key scenes and attempted discussion of the novel's epistolary structure and multiple narratives. Weaker responses offered blunt views of Dracula as evil and the 'Crew of Light' as good with limited discussions of how characters deliver this conflict. Those candidates with wide ranging knowledge of the text did well because they could discuss the effects in terms of horror, tension and character development, particularly in terms of Mina and Van Helsing. One effective answer discussed East/West conflict and Victorian ideology of 'owning the east' as represented by Dracula, developing into a discussion of the invasion of 'the other'.
- (b) This question was a little more popular than the (a) option. Candidates were able to write about how the passage creates tension, better answers exploring the immediacy of thought and action

that results from the use of diaries, sketched in the immediate context for the passage. They selected language that provides evidence of uncertainty or anxiety, or evidence of Harker's frustrations and conjectures in the passage. Reference to the wider text was often brief and generalised with Examiners reporting some candidates making little use of the passage and relying instead on plot-based knowledge of the whole text and how this creates tension. This limited responses considerably in terms of relevance to the question and analysis. Some candidates bolted context onto the end of the essay with little awareness of how these aspects related to the concerns of the passage or wider text. Better answers focused on the use of imagery, such as that of sleep, juxtaposing the power of the Count as he re-energises with the vulnerability of Harker.

Question 6

WALT WHITMAN: Selected Poems from *Leaves of Grass*

- (a) There were very few answers to this question but Examiners saw some sound examples that included references to the American Civil War and how it affected Whitman's character and writing. More successful responses also alluded to Whitman's place in the canon of American literature and his views on democracy and the celebration of the USA as the beacon of light to democratic nations. One answer seen made a confident comparison between *I Sing the Body Electric* and *I Hear America Singing* with *I Saw in Louisiana a Live-Oak Growing*. Another used the social context, ideas about transcendentalism and biographical details to discuss, in more general terms, Whitman's admiration for the American people, the war and his views of himself. The most successful answers shaped their material effectively to the question and created sustained analytical arguments.
- (b) This question attracted a range of answers and was more popular than the (a) option on this text. Most responses showed understanding of the poem, *A Noiseless Patient Spider*, and all but the weakest were able to link the presentation of the spider with the human soul. Some discussed Whitman's ideas of transcendentalism with a few making wider reference to the selection such as *I Hear America Singing*. Some very good answers confidently analysed poetic devices and explored ideas about connection between people, observation of the natural world and Whitman's own view of himself. Some candidates worked through the poem line by line, occasionally demonstrating a view of it as a whole text, but there were some for whom it appeared that this was the first time they had encountered the poem, and it was treated as an unseen text. More successful responses ranged across the collection by linking the main ideas in the given poem including isolation, existentialism, romanticism and identity to other poems such as *Leaves of Grass* and *I Saw in Louisiana a Live-Oak Growing* developing insightful views about Whitman's methods and concerns. One answer contrasted the poem with *Beat! Beat! Drums!* in terms of imagery linked to turmoil and chaos rather than the more contemplative and quieter, 'noiseless spider'.

Section B

Question 7

SUJATA BHATT: Selected Poems from *Point No Point*

- (a) This proved a popular text in the series but 7(b) was much more popular. Candidates selected poems such as *A Different History*, *Garlic in War and Peace*, *Go to Ahmedabad* and *Genealogy* to discuss aspects of Indian life and culture. Responses included discussion of colonialism, erosion of Indian culture, religion, oppression through the English language and the importance of garlic. Some explorations of the significance of garlic went into detail about its powers, nostalgic nature, heritage and how it relates to prejudice. The most successful answers were able to link ideas and themes such as identity to aspects of form, structure and language. Some candidates found it difficult to develop their own personal interpretations of the use of Indian life and culture in Bhatt's work and some dealt with the poems separately, struggling to draw a cohesive argument in response to the question. Others argued that Bhatt wanted readers to appreciate Indian culture and used this to explain different aspects such as the significance of peacocks and Hindu gods.
- (b) This was an extremely popular question and candidates of all abilities enjoyed writing about the given poem, *Walking Across the Brooklyn Bridge, July 1990*. Disillusionment with the American Dream was a frequent contextual argument. Effective answers considered the structure and form of the poem and the repetition of walking across the bridge to show the continuity and focus of the speaker's thoughts. The speaker's disgust at crimes against and neglect of innocent children –

‘Was the mother really asleep?’ – contrasts with her sympathy for the plight of refugees, the huge sacrifices they are prepared to make and the irony of their belief in the Statue of Liberty as a symbol of freedom and safety. Some limited responses focused almost exclusively on the idea of Bhatt leaving her homeland and there was a sense that some of these were pre-prepared essays struggling to adapt an argument to the given poem. The weakest responses demonstrated very little knowledge and understanding of the poem with some speculative interpretations. There was some straightforward analysis of the poem’s concerns around homicide levels in the United States from the perspective of an outsider. Competent discussion was seen in a few answers on the use of the cage on the bridge as a representation of social decay while the bridge itself offers detachment from the brutality taking place below. The best answers dealt with a range of relevant ideas with maturity and insight and incorporated awareness of the irony of the refugees risking their lives to seek safety for their children in a violent land. One excellent answer compared the detachment of American society to the suffering of others in *Go to Ahmedabad*.

Question 8

LOUISE GLÜCK: Selected Poems from *The Wild Iris*

- (a) Very few answers were seen to this question and Examiners reported that those they saw were, in most cases, strong responses. Consideration of form, structure and language was focused and supported, particularly in the use of personification which one candidate described as ‘conveying a sense of intimacy’. Spiritual and biblical links were discussed across Glück’s work but there was little reference to details of the poet’s life and how it affected her poetry. *The Wild Iris* and *The Garden* were most commonly used with others seen including *The White Rose* and *The White Lilies*.
- (b) This was a much more popular question than the (a) option on this text and a range of achievement was seen. Most candidates demonstrated at least familiarity with *Midsummer* and could refer to other poems about the Creator. They identified the irascible, exasperated tone of the speaking and his criticism of mankind’s expectations and behaviour – ‘strangling each other/in the open field’ – Man’s egotism and self-absorption were also identified in the image of ‘fixed like telescopes on some/enlargement of yourselves’. Some struggled to make sense of the poem and had little grasp of context while others had a partially clear understanding of points of view but became repetitive in their assertion of the Creator’s general dissatisfaction with mankind. There were some effective answers that engaged in close analysis of the poem’s imagery along with empathic insight into the Creator’s frustration and omnipotent sadness. There was some good, sustained analysis of Glück’s use of questions, lists of opposites and fragmented sentence structure to suggest the Creator’s frustration.

Question 9

JAMES JOYCE: *Dubliners*

- (a) There were very few responses to this text and the (b) question was slightly more popular than the (a) option. Those seen featured *Araby*, *An Encounter*, *Eveline* and *The Boarding House* which were appropriately chosen for the question focus. Candidates attempted to put the stories into the context of frustrated ambition and paralysis, arguing that some experiences that might have been an adventure or new beginning turned out to be disappointing. A tendency to drift into narrative summary was evident as the textual knowledge and understanding needed to analyse Joyce’s effects did not appear to be in place in these weak responses. One or two stronger answers were seen featuring clear comparisons. These answers dealt with the idea of ‘romance’ in a traditional sense rather than in an ideological context.
- (b) This question attracted few answers. Some candidates seemed to find the extract challenging and lacked the detailed knowledge required to consider Joyce’s presentation of religion, the importance of money or the exposure of ‘little failings’. These answers lacked security in how the passage reflects Joyce’s concerns and did not make links to the wider story or collection. They focused on the description of the priest and his sermon with partial understanding of the significance of the reference to business and his role as a ‘spiritual accountant’. Better answers were able to discuss detail of language, form and structure, focusing on the importance of religion, but limited themselves in terms of its wider significance and exploration of other interpretations.

Question 10

TONI MORRISON: *Beloved*

- (a) This was quite a popular text with both questions attracting broadly similar numbers of answers. This was an accessible and straightforward question focusing on the relationship between Denver and Beloved. Candidates performed well when they had a detailed working knowledge of the text, and it was clear that many of the weaker responses lacked both knowledge and understanding. Some answers restricted themselves to the earlier stages of the relationship between the characters or relied on narrative summary. More successful answers took a strategic approach, outlining the change in Denver from embracing Beloved as a long-lost sister to becoming jealous of Beloved's obsession with Sethe and recognising the danger Beloved presents. A few discussed Denver's role in getting rid of her sister. Better answers were able to balance Denver's early nurturing of Beloved and pleasure in having a sister despite Sethe's favourable treatment of Beloved at Denver's expense. They discussed Denver's realisation of Beloved's parasitic relationship with the deteriorating Sethe and Denver's progression from isolation to leaving the house to seek help from the community. Most recognised Beloved as an embodiment of Sethe's guilt and pain. Some very good answers engaged with the changing and conflicting nature of the relationship, grasping the symbolic weight of Beloved's presence in terms of trauma and suffering.
- (b) A full range of achievement was seen in response to this extract-based question. Most were able to comment on the context of slavery and its implications to the community but often did not venture beyond the extract. Straightforward answers focused on characters explaining Sethe's violent and traumatic experiences at Sweet Home and Paul D's method of coping with his memories by putting them into 'the tobacco tin lodged in his chest'. Some candidates were able to offer balanced personal responses to Sethe's trauma and the act of re-memory evident in the extract, developing a view of its power as Sethe is unable to escape her past. There was understanding of Halle's helplessness, resulting in him smearing butter all over himself and Sethe's wish she could have escaped the same way, through going mad. The shift in time was not always recognised in Sethe's interaction with Paul D and most did not understand the meaning of the bit. There was some wider reference to other parts of the novel but little evidence of AO5. The most successful responses were clear on immediate context and explored how Morrison's concerns about the way traumatised victims of slavery deal with the past were presented through free indirect speech. They explored the ironic tone, imagery of eating and the use of questions and repetition to create a structural dynamic in the passage. Evidence of close reading was embedded and candidates working in the higher levels were able to range around the novel in their arguments about Morrison's treatment of memory.

Question 11

JEAN RHYS: *Wide Sargasso Sea*

- (a) This was a very popular text and there were equal numbers of answers to the two options. Candidates tended to be confident with the plot but often lacked discussion of more specific literary methods with analysis often expressed through broader choices of narrative structure and characterisation. Contextual ideas of racism, slavery and societal structures were discussed along with double oppression of women through race and gender. One successful approach focused on contrasting Annette and Antoinette and the parallel experiences of oppression experienced by them. Others developed this further with examples of women such as Cora and Christophine who transcend the oppressive burden of patriarchal control. Some considered the ways in which social oppression of the women builds to a tragic dimension in the manner and circumstances of Antoinette's madness and death. There was some confusion over the social position of Creole women and whether they were white or black. Most candidates mentioned the 'white cockroach' insult and some, 'Rochester's' increasing sense of Antoinette as being alien, someone he could not be rejected by, or gossiped about or allow to live independently of himself or have another lover. Less effective responses relied on generalised discussion of the patriarchy and offered brief character sketches of the female characters, sometimes working through them one at a time.
- (b) The full range of achievement was seen in responses to this question with most candidates confidently able to place the passage in the wider context of the novel. Some focused exclusively on the relationship between Amelie and Antoinette, ignoring the letter and the narrator's point of view. Straightforward answers struggled to analyse details and integrate these into wider arguments. Better responses made good use of the passage to explore how Daniel Cosway's letter is unreliable, reflecting his unreliability as a character. There was some interesting analysis of the

letter and how Amelie is not an outsider, 'she belongs to the island', while Antoinette is clearly from the outside. These were well-linked to the wider text. The theme of madness was explored by a number of candidates with varying support and development. Some candidates referred to wider reading of Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* as an example of literary context and explored issues of identity, yearning for freedom and the destruction of women in a patriarchal society. Many candidates suggested that this point in the novel is a turning point for 'Rochester' and some mentioned the eventual 'madwoman in the attic' context.

Question 12

NATASHA TRETHEWEY: *Native Guard*

- (a) There were insufficient answers to this question to comment on the performance of candidates.
- (b) There were very few answers to this question on the poem, *Letter*. Most were comfortable writing about the poem and some analysed Trethewey's use of the symbolism of letters and words to explore her concerns. Most understood her specific context in terms of her relationship with her mother and experience of grief. While many answers lacked wider references to the collection, some conversely focused on the collection at the expense of the set poem. A couple of answers offered running commentaries with attention paid to the use of enjambment and caesura, arguing that this effect mimics the spoken voice.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/43

Pre- and Post-1900 Poetry and Prose

Key messages

- Planning is a useful and effective tool when used strategically to structure and focus an answer.
- Analysis should always refer to the effects of form, structure and language rather than focus on devices and technical terminology without a sense of the context in which they are being used and their effect on the reader.
- Knowledge and understanding of the texts are the foundations on which a successful essay is based and candidates should recognise that AO1 and selection of textual detail is key.

General comments

Rubric infringements, while fewer in number than in previous years, are still seen by Examiners and when this happens it is obviously very damaging to outcomes for each candidate affected. The paper requires candidates to answer one question from **Section A** and one from **Section B**. **One answer must be on a poetry text and the other answer on a prose text.**

Although candidates' planning is not read or marked by Examiners, planning is very useful to candidates in considering how they will structure their argument, use the material they plan to include and ensure coverage of the assessment objectives. Planning is personal to each candidate and is a process that should be developed throughout their study for the 9695 course rather than as an activity purely used in exams. Planning helps to avoid false starts (candidates attempting one option and abandoning the attempt after realising they prefer the other option), steadies the mind and offers an aide memoire for the candidate to use as they progress through their answers. Examiners see the evidence of good planning in focused answers that demonstrate progression of ideas with development of arguments and relevant, well-integrated support. Some candidates approach **(b)** answers by working through the extract provided line-by-line. This is not very helpful in enabling them to consider the whole extract, its structure and significance. Candidates planning for **(b)** answers should consider the presentation and significance of the extract as a whole and how the detail supports this in the context of the wider work. The best answers take a strategic view from the beginning, clearly indicating their plan and direction for the response in a relevant introduction. It is fine to diverge into an additional area of relevant interest or add details as the answer unfolds but a robust opening makes for a secure foundation. General introductions and 'catch all' comments do not support achievement.

Examiners saw some very impressive analysis this series. The best answers focused their approach on ways in which writers create effects using language, form and structure with some relevant and accurate inclusion of technical terminology and evidence of thoughtful and original insight into how these effects contribute to the meaning and purpose of the studied work. Good answers keep the writer in view, referring to them throughout (by surname) and ensuring that a sense of writer's intent is foregrounded. In a response on *Beloved*, for example, a candidate wrote, 'Morrison's implementation of a fragmented narrative enables readers to form a view of Baby Suggs and the impact she has in the novel's action'. The identification of an effect should then be explained and illustrated with an example from the text. Some candidates restrict themselves to a broad-brush approach, referring to 'diction' or 'words' linked to a generic effect and sometimes lacking exemplification of any kind. The more specific a point, the more impact it is likely to have. General comments such as, 'Diction is used to present the character of Baby Suggs' with little or no supporting reference have been seen by Examiners and are not an effective approach. Similarly, clumping phrases together with an overarching reference to an effect does not constitute the kind of analysis required for AO2. Some candidates are still unhelpfully name-dropping technical terminology without understanding the meaning of the terms or linking them to examples from the text.

Knowledge and understanding of the texts studied underpin success at A level. It is essential that candidates know and understand their prose and poetry texts very well and recognise the significance of genre, an

aspect of literary context. Knowledge should not be restricted to plot and individual characters. Themes, context, interaction between characters and methods deployed by the writer are all useful knowledge. If writing about a specific poem for the **(b)** option, it is essential to consider it in the wider context of the selection or collection chosen. A level study requires an awareness of how the given poem is characteristic of the poet's work so simply writing about the given poem does not meet the brief for these questions. The majority of the answer must deal with the text on the page, but without contextualisation and reference to other poems, this does not fulfil the demands of the question or mark scheme. Use of integrated support through quotations and references to particular effects and episodes is important in demonstrating strong knowledge and understanding. Contextual knowledge is not the same as background knowledge and it is important that candidates are aware of how to use this knowledge to best effect. Sometimes contextual knowledge is very shaky indeed with Examiners reporting examples of errors such as reference to Chaucer as 'a Victorian' and Toni Morrison 'writing in the 1860s'. Points of context must be linked to the question and wider argument.

Examiners report seeing much improvement in the application of AO5, evaluation of opinions of others. Some effective use of varying arguments, different critical views and theoretical concepts has been seen. Moreover, these are more purposefully integrated throughout answers rather than appearing as an 'add on' at the end of a response. While this is encouraging, there are still many answers reflecting no inclusion of AO5 at all or paying scant attention to it. This objective is a key component of the A level specification, and it is important that candidates address it in some way.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

JANE AUSTEN: *Pride and Prejudice*

- (a) There were several answers to this question on Austen's presentation of Mr Bennet, but it was not as popular as the **(b)** option on this text. Some candidates directed heavy criticism of the character citing neglect of his family, removing himself to his study and failing to curb Lydia's behaviour, allowing her to go to Brighton etc. His preference for Elizabeth over his other daughters was identified, with one or two answers reflecting on his support of her over her refusal of Mr Collins's marriage proposal and his concern for her happiness in her acceptance of Mr Darcy. Some explored Mr Bennet's relationship with his wife and saw his wit in the dialogue with her as a defence against her frustrating foolishness. Most answers were clear and relevant with the best answers seen offering a range of apposite support and analysis of effects.
- (b) This was an extremely popular question with all levels of achievement seen. Most answers focused on the portrayal of Mrs Bennet in the extract with effective responses revealing close reading and appreciation of the language used by Austen to describe the character's joy at receiving the news of Lydia's impending marriage to Mr Wickham. Some discussed methods used by Austen to explore the limitations of Mrs Bennet's understanding through the narrative commentary, her dialogue and Elizabeth's reaction. Most candidates referred to the wider text to exemplify Mrs Bennet's anxiety and enthusiasm for getting her daughters married. The best answers provided apt and well-integrated quotation from the novel to illustrate their arguments. Less successful responses lacked basic understanding and offered unmediated endorsement of Mrs Bennet's delight. Use of contextual detail varied with focused responses embedding relevant detail in their answers, for example, in discussing the situational background of Lydia's elopement and implications for the Bennet family. Some began to discuss the ironic perspective filtering through. Some very astute responses provided sensitive understanding of Mr Bennet's angry, guilt-ridden reaction and explored Austen's skill in pairing this with the comedy inherent in Mrs Bennet's responses.

Question 2

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

- (a) This question attracted few answers. Most candidates were able to comment on how married life for Januarie meant that he could capture a young, beautiful woman and that it had some benefits for him. Some identified that this meant few benefits for May, and in the end her cuckolding of him

was to be expected. Less successful answers sometimes had problems with communication and expression and in some instances, there was excessive use of critics with some AO5 contributions lacking relevance to the focus of the question and arguments presented. Knowledge and understanding were evident with varying levels of detail and security, but personal response was less well developed across most answers.

- (b) There were insufficient answers to this question to comment on the performance of candidates.

Question 3

JOHN DONNE: Selected Poems

- (a) There were very few answers to this question, and these tended to be well-written and able to respond to the theme of attitudes to death with confidence and insight. Poems used included *A Valediction Forbidding Mourning*, *Holy Sonnets: Divine Meditation 10* and *The Apparition*. One successful answer argued that Donne 'perceives death as a temporary separation, emphasising enduring spiritual love over physical existence'. Critical views and evaluation of different interpretations were done well in these answers.
- (b) This question based on *The Good Morrow* was more popular than the (a) option on this text. Effective answers demonstrated detailed knowledge of the given text and considered the aubade as an aspect of literary context, writing about *The Sun Rising* alongside the given poem to illustrate some of Donne's characteristic effects and concerns. Analysis included focus on the details of the argument, global imagery and belligerent tone. Some candidates explored ways in which Donne uses quite simple language to suggest how all-encompassing love is. Less successful answers tended to paraphrase the poem with some commenting on the use of questions and broadly considering Donne's treatment of love as something physical and spiritual.

Question 4

THOMAS HARDY: *Far from the Madding Crowd*

- (a) There were insufficient answers to this question to comment on the performance of candidates.
- (b) There were insufficient answers to this question to comment on the performance of candidates.

Question 5

BRAM STOKER: *Dracula*

- (a) This question on Stoker's presentation of different attitudes to women in the novel attracted few answers. Most offered sensible outlines of an argument but appeared to lack the detailed knowledge required to make a meaningful discussion of effects. Discussion of the patriarchy was used as an approach to consider women being perceived as weak and in need of protection. These answers focused on how the men care for Lucy and their initial instinct to protect Mina and exclude her from their plans despite her 'man's brain' and obvious capabilities. There was some discussion of the way the male characters viewed female emotions and sexual powers with reference to Lucy's desire to have three husbands, the predatory nature of the vampires at the castle in their behaviour with Jonathan and his disgust of them, matched by the men's horror at Dracula's defilement of Lucy and Mina. A good deal of general discussion was seen relating to contemporary views of women, the challenge to ideas about women's roles in Mina's efficiency in using new technology and the reassuring inevitability of her return to the domestic role at the end.
- (b) This question was a little more popular than the (a) option. Some effective analysis of the passage was seen in a number of answers but there was little reference to the significance of the wider text. Some candidates wrote effectively about Harker's presentation of horror, the description of Dracula and Mina's condition, particularly the blood. Some contrasted Van Helsing's practical actions with Dracula's reaction to holy water and crucifixes and sudden disappearance. In terms of context there was consideration of gothic features such as the moonlight and the white nightdress. Less successful answers tended to describe the passage with some broad personal response to the scene presented.

Question 6

WALT WHITMAN: Selected Poems from *Leaves of Grass*

- (a) There were few answers to this question, but this remains a popular text generating a wide range of responses. The majority of answers selected appropriate poems to explore Whitman's presentation of intense emotions, with *O Captain! My Captain!*, *The Wound-Dresser* and *Pioneers! O Pioneers!* seen most commonly. Candidates had little problem identifying intense emotions to discuss and there was some relevant use of context incorporating aspects of Whitman's life and the historical background of America at the time he was writing. Some very good responses demonstrated close analysis and knowledge of the poems and the connections between them. There was considerable enthusiasm in personal responses and the best candidates articulated their responses with relish, for example, 'In his poem, *Whoever You Are Holding Me Now in Hand*, Whitman crescendos into eroticism.'
- (b) This question attracted a large range of answers and was the most popular answer on this text, focusing on an extract from *I Sing the Body Electric*. Most candidates explored the celebratory nature of Whitman's view of the human body with varying degrees of analysis. Some excellent answers were seen with close analysis of the poem and wide-ranging, engaged commentary. One candidate wrote how the poem 'brings focus to anatomy involved in the reproduction of human life which serves as a universal process, that is emphasised by the personal pronoun, "you". This may serve as a means of removing social stigma surrounding sex by unifying individuals through this act.' Some candidates discussed homoeroticism in the given poem and as a wider reference across the selection. Most answers noticed the use of repetition, lists and anaphora and tried to explain how these contributed to Whitman's use of tone. The lists of people elicited reference to *I Hear America Singing* in some responses. Less successful responses tried to use critics and other opinions on the text constantly resulting in a lack of clarity and fluency. These answers tended to drift from the question.

Section B

Question 7

SUJATA BHATT: Selected Poems from *Point No Point*

- (a) This is a popular text on the paper but this question on Bhatt's use of narrative was answered by just a few candidates, with the majority who have studied Bhatt, choosing the (b) option. Most answers seen were at least moderately successful. Some commented usefully on Roland Barthes, the French literary theorist, and his signification theory. They attempted to use this theory in arguments about Bhatt's use of narrative with mixed results. Some interesting discussions were seen on *27 April 1989* and how Bhatt sees herself in Beethoven's piano and how this is commenting on her potential. Other poems used included *Eurydice Speaks* and *A Different History*.
- (b) This was an extremely popular question and candidates of all abilities enjoyed writing about the given poem, *Oranges and Lemons*. There were some very insightful responses with one or two candidates demonstrating a view of Bhatt's presentation of children in the wider collection. Most explained the context and the importance of Anne Frank's room, considering the contrast between the sense of stillness and reflection created in the first two stanzas and the rush and noise of the schoolgirls. Some discussed the impact of the song, including its initial random nonchalance and the ironic aptness of 'Remember me/When I am dead ...'

Candidates offered personal views of how Bhatt presents the connection the girls felt with Anne Frank through analysis of their behaviour. Less successful responses struggled to grasp the context of the poem and some misunderstood or did not recognise the significance of the nursery rhyme or the title of the poem. The best answers demonstrated sensitive awareness of the layered nature of the poem and the poignant depths of the imagery and its associations.

Question 8

LOUISE GLÜCK: Selected Poems from *The Wild Iris*

- (a) There were insufficient answers to this question to comment on the performance of candidates.

- (b) A few candidates answered this question on the poem, *Clear Morning*, with most answers demonstrating some wider knowledge of the selection. Few responses explored the deeper meaning of the poem and the least successful offered insubstantial handling of the poem's concerns and effects. Often the tone of the speaker was identified but rarely the final threat of 'forcing clarity upon you'. Only one or two responses clearly identified the central criticism of man's preoccupation with objects. One effective answer explored Glück's use of the couplet structure and direct address to comment on the 'irrelevance of human realities and the lack of self-awareness at the heart of the human condition.'

Question 9

JAMES JOYCE: *Dubliners*

- (a) There were insufficient answers to this question to comment on the performance of candidates.
- (b) There were very few answers to this question on the extract from *A Painful Case*. Responses tended to be strong with a couple of good answers taking the approach of briefly sketching the context to explain what had taken place and why Mr Duffy felt so guilty before exploring how Joyce sets up the epiphany. There was evidence of sensitive personal response to his isolation in the pub and his emerging feelings of empathy for Mrs Sinico, recognising her loneliness and beginning to realise that he too is alone, 'an outcast from life's feast' and his responsibility for her death. In tracking the emotional journey of the character candidates confidently explored Joyce's use of imagery and incorporated apposite details of context in relation to Dublin and the significance of the 'grey gleaming river'.

Question 10

TONI MORRISON: *Beloved*

- (a) Very few responses were seen to this question on the presentation of *Sweet Home* in the novel. Most answers considered the irony of the name, and the best discussed the relevance of 'home' to Sethe and Paul D and how Morrison relates memory of *Sweet Home* to the wider context of slavery and suffering. Some selected relevant details of description to contrast the beauty of the place with the horrors enacted there, such as the 'lynchings that took place in the beautiful trees'. The subversion of home to be a place of death, suffering and exploitation was argued convincingly with some candidates making very effective reference to Morrison's narrative style.
- (b) This question was more popular than the (a) option on this text. Some responses attempted to place the passage in its context and Morrison's methods within the modernist style of fragmentation with varying success. Candidates commented on how the style of writing here communicates the cyclical nature of traumatic memory and how, in attempting to 'beat back the past', troubled people were waylaid by triggers such as 'schoolteacher's hat' which explained Sethe's later reaction to seeing Mr Baldwin (who she mistook for schoolteacher) causing her to feel the hummingbirds stick 'their needle beaks right through her headcloth' just as she experiences in the passage. Some explored the use of the word, 'circling', considering ideas of truth being simple and the horror of Sethe's concept of safety. The best answers reflected on how Sethe is never truly free – in her head or from slavery. Perceptive personal responses to Sethe's desire to belong and have a home explored the irony of the house never really being hers and the poignant reaction of Paul D at the end of the passage, 'Your love is too thick'.

Question 11

JEAN RHYS: *Wide Sargasso Sea*

- (a) This was a very popular text with the (b) option significantly more popular than this question on the structure of *Wide Sargasso Sea*. A range of achievement was seen. Some answers struggled with historical context, misplacing the novel's setting in time with some basic errors in terms of knowledge, such as a reference to 'Bertha in the basement'. Others lapsed swiftly into narrative approaches. Moderately successful answers were able to identify the division of the text into parts and how Rhys uses different narrative viewpoints. Better answers connected the use of fire at the beginning and end with the fire at Coulibri a warning of the fire at Thornfield. The repetition of madness was also seen as a structural device. Some candidates struggled to develop their answers in meaningful detail.

- (b) The full range of achievement was seen in responses to this question with most candidates confidently addressing the passage and its wider context in the novel. The strongest answers incorporated close, detailed analysis with wide and extended knowledge of the whole text. Some made interesting and impressive arguments about intertextuality with Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and focused to great effect on the relationship between Antoinette and Annette. One example noted how the use of pronouns, 'I', 'me' and 'she' 'emphasise Antoinette's persistent longing for reconciliation even after her mother's death'. Most responses demonstrated relevant personal arguments when analysing the dramatic details of the abuse and its racial element. Some mentioned that, in this part of the novel, 'Rochester' is given the narrative voice with interesting discussions about the extent to which he can be considered a reliable narrator. The best commentary on this aspect considered the significance of Antoinette's memory being recounted through the perspective of her husband, another way of her losing autonomy as her husband's interpretation is imposed on hers. Most answers discussed the dramatic effect of the repetition all through the dialogue of the use of the name, 'Bertha', and criticised the use of the assertive, 'you must be Bertha', identifying her final surrender in the loss of her identity.

Question 12

NATASHA TRETHEWEY: *Native Guard*

- (a) There were insufficient answers to this question to comment on the performance of candidates.
- (b) There were a few answers to this question on the poem, *January 1863*. Most were effective and demonstrated an appreciation of the ironies of the ex-slaves having learned from their experience of slavery to enjoy the 'bond in labour' and how to tie things down efficiently while the white men, 'would-be-masters', were their prisoners. They also discussed the significance and effectiveness of 'cross-hatched', the ropes cracking 'like whips' and the use of caesura and enjambment in the second entry which puts emphasis on particular words. There were few attempts to link the poem to the wider text and there was also evidence that some weaker answers were offered as 'unseen' responses: some were not clear that this was a black, ex-slave writing his journal and the letters for the white prisoners. One response thought that the use of 'X' as a signature was because the writer wished to remain anonymous.