

LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

Paper 0486/11

Paper 11 (Open Book)

Key messages

The following are necessary for success in this component:

- Poetry: explore meaning, significance and personal response then show how the writer uses language for effect to create that meaning.
- Prose extracts: always discuss language.
- Drama: discussion of punctuation, form and of stage directions should always be tethered to meaning.
- Focus on the key words in a question.
- Quotations should support points and be integrated into the flow of the argument.

General comments

Prose questions were generally well answered, detailed and appreciative of themes and characters, with much personal engagement with the texts. Drama answers were often, inevitably, from a reader's perspective rather than an audience's. Close engagement with the texts was achieved much more frequently with the extract questions and good responses covered numerous points, showing the entire piece had been read.

There were some very good empathic answers with much textual evidence. Generally candidates did not include enough textual echo or reference to relevant details during their thoughts on the relevant moment. Sometimes the moment itself was not focused on with sufficient tightness.

Essay structure improves year on year. Most responses have introductions and conclusions, linked paragraphs, and points supported by textual evidence though there are still examples of formulaic introductions which contribute very little. Less effective essays had lengthy introductions and relied too much on detailed paraphrase, unnecessary biographical detail and broad discussion of related social issues. Many candidates referred closely and regularly to the question though some depended much too heavily on general and sometimes arguable assertions. As often, concise answers with precise points tended to score more highly than longer unfocused essays.

Many candidates showed good knowledge and understanding of texts and the best focused on an author's methods and techniques, the 'How' or 'In what ways' of the question.

Quotations should support the point being made. In the best answers, quotations were brief and integrated seamlessly into the argument.

In poetry questions particularly, candidates should avoid paraphrase or line-by-line identification of literary terms with no discussion of the meaning at all. Merely rehearsing sophisticated and complex language terms does not demonstrate understanding or personal appreciation. Similarly the trend to write about punctuation has grown and is unhelpful in commenting on passages from Shakespeare.

There were very few unfinished papers and very few rubric infringements.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Drama

ARTHUR MILLER: *All My Sons*

- 1 This was a popular question and there were some good attempts to 'explore the ways', though some candidates struggled to identify them, citing stage directions, dialogue and the characters themselves. All concentrated on Keller, with a little on Ann and Chris. Candidates might have explored Keller's pride in his humble background and being a self-made man, mixed with awareness of his educational limitations. A good differentiator was whether candidates saw the deeper implications behind Keller's words. There is more to his offer to Deever than simple goodwill and his anger over Ann's rejection of her father reveals his own fears. Good answers were perceptive and though they relied to some extent on hindsight, showed understanding of how an audience would react to the implications of what is being said without knowing the outcome. Weaker answers were not focused on the passage and spent too long on generalities and paraphrase.
- 2 There were many points of view, all supported, with the more successful attempting a balanced response and differentiating between mother and wife. Most candidates made the point that in refusing to accept Larry's death Kate stops the family from moving on and that she fails to appreciate Chris and his need to live his own life. She appears to offer little support to her husband, particularly at the end of the play although it could be argued that she has good reason for much of the above, in that she alone in the family knows her husband's guilt. She can hardly live with that knowledge, except by believing that her son is still alive and was not a victim of her husband's disgrace. At the end of the play she is the one who gives maternal comfort to her remaining son, Chris, and encourages him to go forward.
- 3 Chris is clearly in a state of anxious excitement. He cannot be sure that Ann will accept his proposal, though he hopes the fact she is coming suggests that she is likely to. He knows what a momentous step this will be to take in regard to his parents, particularly his mother. He wants to stay in the firm but cannot be sure this will be possible. This was the least popular question of the three but the best answers showed understanding of Chris's worries and fears about his parents and conveyed his idealism and also his impatience.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Julius Caesar*

- 4 This was a very popular question. Most understood Cassius's new worries and fears, and detected a change in his character or at least in the audience's perception of his character, from earlier in the play. The extract immediately follows the acrimonious parley at Philippi with Antony and Octavius. After their earlier quarrel over strategy, Brutus and Cassius are reconciled and resigned to their fates. Cassius is admitting to some superstition and there are references to birds of ill-omen which have replaced the eagles. There is a fatalism in his attitude to the coming battle, and a suggestion from both him and Brutus that they will not allow themselves to be taken as prisoners. Good answers considered the language in some detail and were sharply focused on 'sympathy'. Weaker answers tended to ignore the context and seemed unsure about what the relationship with Brutus actually was, although all recognised the farewell.
- 5 Good answers conveyed Antony's pragmatism, his keen intelligence and his passion with well-selected references from the play. Some weaker answers focused more on Brutus; some were distracted by the funeral speech at the expense of the rest of the text, and some wrote generally about Antony. Good answers ranged widely and in detail through the play.
- 6 Good answers covered Portia's anxiety for Brutus because he has been preoccupied and worried. She might be speculating on the reason for the secret visit of the conspirators – or has Brutus told her of the plot? She would be afraid for the future. They conveyed Portia's nobility and her admiration of that in her husband in an appropriate voice, and they also included some apt reference and occasional textual echoes. Detail was often lacking and this held back some answers. Weaker answers consisted of generalised emotion.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *The Tempest*

- 7 Although Ferdinand is on stage during the shipwreck scene, he does not speak then. These are his first words and express his bewilderment and grief. Ariel's song summarises what Ferdinand imagines to be his father's fate. Both Miranda and Ferdinand refer to the supernatural or spiritual in their comments about each other when they fall in love at first sight. Candidates sometimes commented on the dramatic irony of Ferdinand's mistaken assumption that he is *de facto* King of Naples. They also commented on Prospero's controlling role in orchestrating the scene, and on his asides to Ariel. The best answers discussed the magical and spiritual nature of the isle and its music. 'Dramatic' was covered less well than 'moving' although some saw the significance of the scene as a turning point. There was extensive quotation of the poetic language, though few analysed its rhythm and diction.
- 8 This was a 'classic' question, and quite popular, but not all that well answered. Most responses covered basic points but they were not developed or detailed. Possible points were that: Prospero has regained his usurped dukedom; the various plots against Prospero and Alonso have been exposed; Ariel has gained his freedom following his loyal service to Prospero. Most answers were straight 'yes'. Better answers commented on the treatment of Caliban and the fact that Antonio and Sebastian show no remorse. Only a very few commented on the idea of the 'rarer action is in virtue than in vengeance'. Very few commented on all the characters, variously omitting Stephano and Trinculo, Alonso and the nobles, even Caliban, or covering only a small part of his role. Quite a few were distracted by the Epilogue, perhaps interpreting 'by the end' as 'at the end'. Some interesting responses explored the idea of whether Prospero perceives that he has achieved justice and discussed the difference between justice and revenge.
- 9 All three characters are still under the influence of the drink they consumed earlier. They have all already been deceived by Ariel, and Trinculo has been beaten by Stephano, who thinks he is making comments which are actually Ariel's. They have completely fallen for the prospect of being involved in ruling the island which Caliban has put before them and Trinculo may well be anticipating the joys of wielding power. Although drunk, Trinculo may have some thoughts about Stephano and his assumption that he will be the dominant figure if their plans come to fruition. He will also be puzzled by the mysterious sound whose source he is trying to find. He may make some reference to Caliban's 'isle is full of noises' speech. He also might think back to the circumstances in which he first encountered Caliban. Although drunk, Trinculo seems to be rather pragmatic and fatalistic and good answers conveyed this. Some candidates found it difficult to capture his drunken voice, and there were certainly answers where the sophisticated diction used was far beyond him. Text references were frequently quite prolific, particularly about Caliban. There were a few exceptionally good answers, writing in the close vocabulary and style of the text, and sometimes following through to the garments and stinking pool.

OSCAR WILDE: *The Importance of Being Earnest*

- 10 It was good to see that all answers were very engaged with the text, and enjoyment very often communicated itself. Most candidates saw the humour in the fact that the proposal is being written down in a diary as it is delivered, Algernon is informed that he has already been engaged for three months without his knowledge, the engagement has been broken off once already and that this experienced man of the world is reduced to amazed near silence by this girl's confident poise. Better answers looked at hyperbole, absurdity, triviality and Wilde's witty, cynical view of accepted attitudes. Many found the humour hard to put into their own words. Several resorted to saying 'It is so funny!' which could be rewarded as personal response. Too many answers merely relied on stating that it was all Wilde's satire of Victorian society, without actually analysing how he did it.
- 11 Jack's life is a perpetual juggling act which gives an air of desperation to his actions. He does not know who he is. He is living two quite separate existences in London and in the country, which involve constant invention and the threat of disclosure. He is constantly worried about Cecily's existence being revealed and is in particular aware of his friend Algernon's interest in the details of his concealed life. The last thing he wants is for Algernon to meet Cecily. Most answers focused on two names and two lives. Knowledge of the whole play was not always demonstrated, even though it is quite a short text.

- 12 Gwendolen is of stout character and will not be downhearted. She is likely to be thinking how she has no intention of losing Ernest or of falling in with her mother's wishes. She will be plotting what to do next, perhaps thinking that a trip to the country is just what is needed. She is likely to be enjoying the excitement of it all. Many found the relationship with Lady Bracknell hard to explain in an authentic voice. Good answers captured her tone and vocabulary precisely and even created some aphorisms of their own.

Section B: Poetry

THOMAS HARDY: Selected Poems

- 13 There were some extremely impressive answers, which analysed meaning and symbolism in detail, including the etymology of 'titanic', and which understood the themes. Most picked up the sinister and dark tone to the poem, with the description of the great liner lying at the bottom of the sea. They saw the contrast between the opulence of the construction and fittings, and the gloom of the ocean resting place. Good answers also explored the idea that the collision was preordained and commented on the form of the poem, the listing of the stanzas and the rhythm and rhyme building to the final line. The focus of the question was on the words 'powerfully dramatic' and it was impossible to convey how Hardy makes the poem so without exploring the language in depth. Weak candidates, who did not know the poem and answered it as an unseen, scored poorly.
- 14 *The Pine Planters* is a projection of Marty South's unrequited feelings for Giles Winterborne in *The Woodlanders*. She feels unnoticed and knows that he is in love with another but there is no anger or jealousy, just acceptance and grief. The simplicity of the language and its conversational tone make it particularly moving and the rhyme scheme is similarly deceptive in its simplicity. There was a clear difference in quality of the answer between those who had been taught about Marty, and those who had not. Some candidates became side-tracked by 'hopeless love' into generalised statements about love. Most followed through the poem using quotations as a basis for their commentary; as the language is accessible here, this worked reasonably well for most.
- 15 Drummer Hodge is a poor and simple conscript fighting in the Boer War. He has been killed in a foreign land and his burial lacks all ceremony. The foreignness of his resting place and the imperviousness of any external powers are conveyed through the language and imagery. There were quite a lot of answers on this poem and some were very assured, responding sensitively to Hodge's fate and to the language and imagery. There was a great deal of engagement with the text. Even weaker answers showed understanding of meaning and major images such as a foreign land and stars. Textual detail was well utilised. What was good about all answers was the empathy and personal response – the best answers were superb in their understanding of Hodge's burial.

There were fewer answers on *No Buyers*, but they were also sympathetic to the old couple's situation, picking up on Hardy's feelings towards the poverty and hardship of the old couple and the sense of hopelessness and futility in the scene. In relation to either poem, the focus had to be on 'moving'.

SONGS OF OURSELVES: from Part 4

Responses to all three 'Songs' questions suffered from feature-spotting literary techniques, without explaining their effects.

- 16 This was probably the most popular question on the paper. Answers needed to focus on the 'disturbing' qualities of the poem. They might have commented on the sense of order and regularity in the first 16 lines and on the artificiality that is conveyed, while noting the use of the verb 'offends' and the simile 'like a rebuke'. The opposition of 'sanities' and 'hysteria' and 'madness' were worthy of comment as was the presentation of the City Planners in lines 29-38. There were answers from all abilities. Weaker answers did not grasp the satire and the implications. Many tried to unravel complex images, one at a time, rather than responding to the poem as a whole. There was a lot of mis-reading. There was, however, a good focus on 'disturbing', with candidates finding many points about which to be disturbed, even if they were not in the poem. Many weaker answers ignored the last two stanzas of the poem.
- 17 Answers needed to focus on 'memories of childhood': responses that explored the difference between the adult and childish perceptions of the horses scored very well. There was much which could be said, so answers were reasonably detailed, picking up on Muir's switch between past and

present, and a child's view of the animals – magical but terrifying and also awesome. Some imagery was a struggle, but on the whole responses were very positive and sometimes sensitive.

- 18 Candidates answered quite well on Hopkins and had a secure knowledge of the theme and language of this poem. 'Striking effects' were quite well covered, with understanding of imagery ranging from convincing to very literal. Most only covered the first part of the poem; there were various attempts to explain 'brinded' cows. Rossetti was quite well discussed too, especially the use of repetition. Some good answers compared the religious imagery in both poems, while others focused on natural imagery. There was no need to compare, but good answers did so naturally.

Section C: Prose

TSITSI DANGAREMBGA: *Nervous Conditions*

- 19 The context is the return of Babamukuru and his family from England, having been greeted by Jeremiah and Nhamo. Tambu is aggrieved at being excluded from the trip to the airport to greet her returning uncle and his family. There is on-going sibling rivalry between Tambu and her brother and Tambu is still sufficiently a child to want to beat her brother up, but is now sufficiently mature to realise that this is no longer an option. She has a growing realisation of the limitations imposed on women by the culture in which she lives. This was the most popular question on this text but most answers only discussed Tambu's thoughts on not visiting the airport. There were a few good answers which explored her feelings about all the other characters in the scene, and related her anger to cultural differences. There were very few references to the writing except to the use of rhetorical questions.
- 20 Both characters are in some ways rebelling against the culture(s) in which they find themselves, both could be seen as headstrong and both are ambitious, particularly academically. Both question assumptions about their pre-ordained roles as girls/women. Candidates often saw similarities in their conflicts with their parents and between Nyasha's argument with her father after the dance and Tambu's refusal to attend her parents' wedding. The words 'vividly convey' were given very little attention on the whole. Some strong responses explored the similarities between the two girls at some length, in particular their academic ambitions and how far they were prepared to go to in order to achieve them, the sense of displacement both felt at being away from the homestead or from England, and their attitudes to the pre-ordained gender roles that were being thrust on them.
- 21 Jeremiah, of course, has not mended the thatch. Tambu and her aunt have. Nonetheless, Jeremiah would be likely to regard the praise as his due and would be pleased to receive some positive recognition from his older brother. As Babamukuru has come to take Tambu back to the mission, Jeremiah might be relieved that there is one less mouth to feed, hostile to the idea that his daughter is being given ideas above her station, and self-congratulatory that the best is being done for his family. Good answers would have captured a convincing voice of a lazy, feckless individual who assumes that everything is due to him because he is a man but there were not many good answers and knowledge of the text was limited. One very strong response captured very convincingly Jeremiah's sense of satisfaction at the way in which the rewards for his daughter's hard work were accruing to him and looked forward with relish to more of the same in future because that was his entitlement.

ANITA DESAI: *Fasting, Feasting*

- 22 Mama has told Uma that there is no point in her continuing at school since she is neither academic nor sporting, and her parents are trying to arrange a marriage for her. She loves school, and she is distraught and looking to the nuns for support. Mother Agnes disappoints because of her lack of understanding and her sexism. Most candidates understood these points and also picked up Uma's mother's response at home. Successful answers commented on the violence of Uma's emotions and responded to the pathos of the situation. Some explored the language in depth. A number of responses engaged very sympathetically with Uma, expressing very strong disapproval of Mamapapa and Mother Agnes.
- 23 There were very few answers to this question and the choice of amusing moments was ill-judged.
- 24 Some candidates found it hard to find Mrs Patton's style of speaking, so they used textual detail instead to identify attitudes and character and this worked quite well. Some created a very convincing voice and conveyed their sympathy for the character through it. They conveyed her

interest in Arun and his ‘foreignness’, wrote about their shopping and cooking together, and her determination to be vegetarian. They often reflected on her family particularly Melanie about whom they tended to attribute a sense of failure. Some candidates captured Mrs Patton’s well-meaning earnestness very successfully.

KIRAN DESAI: *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*

- 25 Most answers were on the extract. Candidates found ‘ridiculous’ easier than ‘magical’; for the latter they used the sensuous description at the start – with the best answers re-creating the sensuality in their own descriptions. This contrasted with the sublime to the ridiculous that followed, everyone singing along with Miss Jyotsna, followed again by detailed comments on the spy. There were excellent paragraphs on the spy’s activities, and language points on the mouse-hole, involving irony and satire. It was so pleasing to see that candidates could analyse their own responses to the humour.
- 26 There were some answers, all quite good in commenting on Sampath’s character, though less strong on detail from the text as a whole. All candidates found him likeable because of his humorous streak, his imaginativeness, his alternative view of the world. Better answers commented on the fact that he is capable of making foolish those who deserve to be made so, of whom there are many in the novel and they also wrote about spiritualism and the lack of it, and Sampath’s close relationship with the monkey companions. Differentiation came from engagement with Desai’s writing, and the ways in which it makes Sampath so engaging.
- 27 Pinky would be incandescently angry as she often is with her brother, thinking that not even he has managed to bring the family name into such disrepute before. She would also be thinking about what this does to her marriage prospects and hoping that her brother leaves home for good before she does him some violence. Though it was not easy for some to find an authentic voice, the emotions were generally accurate and the best answers conveyed Pinky’s characteristic tone.

GEORGE ELIOT: *Silas Marner*

- 28 This was a very popular text, and very popular question. There were some very good answers indeed, exploring Silas’s ‘transformation’, the spiritual connotations, and the role of Eppie. Some reference to the context – the collapse of Molly in the snow and Eppie finding her way to Marner’s cottage was useful. All understood the gold references, the links back to Lantern Yard, Silas’s new paternal feelings, and his being received back into the community. Candidates showed real sympathy and empathy for someone who is a fictional character and responded freely to what is moving about the extract. Good answers explored the writing in detail, commenting on the contrasts and significances and on the symbolism and imagery. It was widely recognised to be a turning point in Silas’s life. The best answers used the full range of the passage. Weaker answers had narrower range but still directed and analysed the material. The weakest answers did not direct the material carefully enough and did not explore why the passage was so moving. Equally evident, but appropriately used in some responses, was sound general knowledge of the novel and links were carefully and successfully made.
- 29 The distinction between ‘not good’ and ‘scoundrel’ was key to a good answer. Answers commented on Godfrey’s weakness in standing up to his brother and father, his behaviour towards Molly and Eppie and balanced this by considering his positive qualities as a husband. Most sympathised with him, blaming his brother, and seeing Nancy’s inability to have children as punishment. This was well answered in terms of understanding, even if the less able did not have command of the textual details.
- 30 All recognised Dolly’s authentic voice, and were able to cite plenty of textual detail about her visit. The best captured life in the village, and what it meant to be a member of it. They included stories that Dolly has heard of Marner through her husband’s conversations in the pub. Although not widely popular, those who did attempt the question often achieved very convincing voices, capturing the essential benevolence of the character in a convincing vernacular.

SUSAN HILL: *I'm the King of the Castle*

- 31 Kingshaw is totally weighed down. The opening description of the countryside is oppressive. Even in daylight he needs to bolster his courage by defying the gargoyles. In the church he feels the deadness of it all and of God’s disapproving presence. He feels an overpowering sense of guilt and

is unable to hide either his real wishes or his fear of Hooper. The question was answered by many, of all abilities, and there was much material for candidates to find. The weakest did not cover the whole extract, or focused only on outside and inside the church. All could understand Kingshaw's state of mind, though quite a few omitted the context, i.e. his desire that Hooper would die from the fall at the castle. The best identified with Kingshaw's emotional agony, isolation, and guilt, exploring in detail how his thoughts developed during the extract, and his utter despair at the end. There was pleasing focus on language in the best answers.

- 32 Again, a popular and well answered question. Answers differed in the material they cited, from a description of the house, the rooms in it, and the garden, to the influence of Mrs Kingshaw and Hooper's father and grandfather. All understood that Warings was Hooper's territory and the source of his power. They saw that it is without any life or homeliness or beauty.
- 33 Hooper's voice needed to be in the tone of the answer, as well as the obvious text references. The best answers articulated his chilling, calculating tone in short emphatic sentences and conveyed his belief that he has all the advantages over Kingshaw, who is a mummy's boy and a wimp and that he will have little difficulty in making Kingshaw's life a misery, and possibly in getting rid of him for good.

from *Stories of Ourselves*

- 34 This question was popular and there were some insightful answers, but most did not make best use of the extract. Few explored Lucy's role, and most just concentrated on a failing marriage and feelings of cultural isolation, often explained in an assertive manner. The best answers considered the symbolism of the mirage and explored the flight incident in detail.
- 35 Very many candidates wrote at length about the whole of *Her First Ball* while omitting the actual end. Some seemed to think that the fat man's depressing comments where what Leila takes away with her and missed the fact that as soon as she begins dancing again she forgets about him and fails to recognise him. There was some understanding of the humour in *At Hiruhamara*, especially the 'throw nothing away' theme and the annual dinner, but answers were often narrative.
- 36 Some found it difficult to find a voice, even as they referred to the goats and the wife, the shopkeeper and the American. The best answers used irony and humour well to capture the character, to whom all responded very positively. The major problem was lack of detail of the moment – there was much general comment about being rich and spending the 100 rupees. Only the best answers conveyed something of the misunderstanding which is the basis of the conversation.

LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

Paper 0486/12
Paper 12 (Open Books)

Key Messages

1. *In poetry questions meaning, significance and personal response need to be explored first, then how the writer uses language for effect to create that meaning.*
2. *Language needs to be discussed in prose extracts.*
3. *The discussion of punctuation, form and of stage directions in drama contributes nothing without reference to meaning.*
4. *There needs to be far more focus on the key words in a question. Words such as ‘explore’, ‘explore the ways’, ‘how’, ‘how far,’ ‘vividly’, ‘memorably’, ‘powerful’, ‘dramatic’, ‘moving’.*
5. *Quotations need to support points, not to be merely added. They should be relatively brief, pertinent and integrated into the argument.*

General Comments

Prose questions were generally well answered, detailed and appreciative of themes and characters, with much personal engagement with the texts. Drama answers were, perhaps inevitably, mostly from a reader's perspective rather than an audience's, with candidates responding to the text on page rather than on the stage. There were some very good empathic answers with much textual evidence; weaker answers kept repeating the emotions of the character or retold the plot with little sense of the character's voice / viewpoint. Generally candidates did not include enough textual echo or reference to relevant details during their thoughts on the relevant moment. Sometimes the moment itself was not tightly enough focused upon. At times the character (such as Sampath in **Question 27**) was limited to repeating the same thing several times in the monologue.

Essay structure improves year on year. There are very few essays now which lack introductions and conclusions, linked paragraphs, and points supported by textual evidence; though there are still examples of formulaic introductions which contribute very little. For example, where candidates' essay structure was less effective, this was often because they were inclined to provide lengthy introductions; detailed paraphrase; unnecessary biographical accompaniment; and broad discussion of related social issues arising from text. These features were especially apparent with 'Julius Caesar', 'The Importance of Being Earnest', and the short story 'The Rain Horse'. Many candidates referred closely and regularly to the question, though some relied much too heavily on general and sometimes arguable assertions. As often, concise answers with precise points supported by relevant quotation tended to score more highly than longer rambling essays which often lost sight of the question.

Plenty of candidates showed good knowledge and understanding of their texts, but a fair number of these candidates nonetheless produced limited responses because they overlooked the need to focus on an author's methods and techniques; the 'How' or 'In what ways' of the question.

The use of quotations could be improved in the work of some candidates. There was often a lack of connection between the point and the quotation as if the candidate had merely put it in because s/he remembered it, not because it supported the point being made. In the best answers, quotations were brief and integrated seamlessly into the argument.

We have argued for so long that candidates need to discuss language that now it has almost gone too far, with some essays being about nothing else. In responses to poetry some candidates have written pages and pages of line-by-line paraphrase, or line-by-line identification of literary terms with no discussion of the meaning of the poem at all. All the sophisticated and complex language terms in the world do not compensate for lack of understanding. For example there were responses to the drama extract questions structured so that there were separate paragraphs on dialogue, diction, stage directions and punctuation, which ultimately failed to convey any understanding of what was actually happening on the stage.

Candidates who began their answers to **Question 1** with “Miller makes the ending dramatic by his use of diction, stage directions, imagery and juxtaposition” were unlikely to be doing themselves many favours. Similarly, the trend to write about punctuation on its own has grown, and is particularly unhelpful in commenting on passages from Shakespeare.

There were very few unfinished papers and very few rubric infringements.

Comments on Specific Questions

Section A: DRAMA

ARTHUR MILLER: *All My Sons*

Question 1

This was a popular question and it was generally very well done in thematic terms. Candidates invariably recognised the power of Chris’s disillusionment as he rages against his father, and the impact of the letter in general. However, few commented upon the effect that the revelation has upon us as we now have to reassess the events of the play so far and readjust our feelings towards Joe. Also, in thematic terms, comments upon The American Dream generally rang hollow with candidates showing little confidence in linking the ending to it in symbolic terms.

A weakness generally was the lack of awareness about the dramatic impact of events. It was highly commendable that many recognised the importance of stage directions in Miller’s plays and mentioned ‘... inaudibly’ when Joe says he has to go to turn himself in. However, the full significance was not appreciated in general. The effect of his mumbled words is to convince us and the other characters that he is a broken man, who will now meekly go along with what Chris plans. It does not occur to us that, in his present state, he has formulated an alternative plan i.e. suicide. When the gunshot is heard, the effect is stunning.

Question 2

Comparatively few candidates attempted this question. There was recognition of the sheltered nature of the house, hiding behind the poplar trees as if in shame. Its location on the outskirts of town was also taken up by many in this respect – a desire for anonymity. The symbolism of Larry’s tree was also recognised by nearly all but here **was** an opportunity to develop ideas about the American Dream that was not taken up by many. Though some highlighted the stage directions which called for a comfortable, quite prosperous looking house, the dramatic impact of illusion over reality was not sufficiently developed. When we first meet Joe on a Sunday morning in his back yard reading his newspaper, he is the picture of the American success story. He is a family man enjoying his day of rest after no doubt working hard throughout the previous week. It is a picture of contentment and serenity. This is our opening impression and, as such, it is a powerful one – hence our shock as the revelations are made later on in the play.

Question 3

Kate will clearly be appalled and terrified by the prospect of Ann’s coming back, and will be asking herself why she is doing so. She might well guess what the object of the trip is and will possibly see this as undermining all her attempts to shield the family from the consequences of Joe’s actions. On the whole this question was not very well done. Too many candidates took a narrow and even superficial view of the moment. It is rare to actually be wrong in an empathetic response, but here some candidates did not recognise Kate’s anxiety about the return of Ann. Whilst she comforts herself with the thought that Ann has kept herself loyal to Larry, there are more ominous fears also.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Julius Caesar*

Question 4

This was a popular question and most candidates were able to make some relevant comment. There was much to comment on here: the secretiveness of the discussion between Brutus and Casca; the popularity of Caesar and his growing power, and the play-acting over the offering of the crown; the excitableness of the ‘common herd’; and the news of the execution of Marullus and Flavius for going against Caesar. Good answers understood and commented on the cynicism of Casca, and the fact that his thoughts are expressed in prose rather than verse. They considered the context of this scene in relation to the conspiracy. Weaker

responses chose an ‘overview’ approach rather than exploring the passage in detail and relating it to the ‘atmosphere in Rome’. Significantly, in this respect, many responses omitted to mention the presence of Cassius and Brutus at all. Quite a lot of candidates failed to mention the fact that the version of events we are given is narrated by Casca – hardly an unbiased account.

Question 5

This was a popular question. Good answers went beyond the character sketch, and presented knowledge of the two women in an argument that demonstrated an understanding of their dramatic significance. Both are well-born noble women, married to powerful men. Portia seems to be treated as more of an equal to Brutus than Calphurnia is to Caesar. Both reveal dramatically aspects of their husband’s characters – e.g. Calphurnia’s dreams expose Caesar’s belief in superstition, as well as his vanity and then his susceptibility to being flattered. Portia’s death occurs at the worst possible moment for Brutus and Cassius, but is to some extent responsible for their reconciliation. Weaker answers showed a basic knowledge of the two women, but were far less successful in exploring ‘how’ Shakespeare made them both ‘so significant’.

Question 6

Lots of candidates showed excellent knowledge of the play in general here. Many candidates recognised Brutus’ tendency towards introspection and they were able to capture this whilst conveying his resignation, fatalism and possible regrets. A weakness of many, however, was to concentrate entirely on the ghost and its reasons for appearing and not mentioning Portia’s suicide – particularly the harrowing nature of it which must haunt Brutus as much as the ghost of Caesar, or his feelings towards Cassius and their earlier argument.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *The Tempest*

Question 7

This was a popular question but it did elicit mixed responses. Prospero is dissembling here, to the bewilderment of Miranda but unfortunately also to the bewilderment of a number of candidates. Some answers were rendered ineffectual by their inability to convey the fact that his anger is feigned. His behaviour as a stern but loving father to Miranda is credible, but his aside to the audience helps to explain the reason for his behaviour. Similarly, the use of magic in staying Ferdinand’s sword, whilst mentioned, was not fully explained in dramatic terms. The sheer power of this demonstration of Prospero’s art is the first time we see it for ourselves and it is very impressive, visually and verbally. What needed to be stressed overall is the authority of Prospero at this moment – over Ferdinand, Miranda and Ariel. Good responses recognised the recurrence of the theme of usurpation and how this relates to the play as a whole; they also paid close attention to the language of the extract, commenting for example on the intensive use of imperatives. Where candidates commented on the behaviour of the other characters, they needed to make it relevant to the question.

Question 8

This was well done on the whole. Most were able to refer to moments such as Prospero’s account of earlier events when speaking to Miranda; their treatment of Gonzalo when he is trying to console Alonso; Sebastian’s insensitive reproaches to Alonso; the thwarted plot against Alonso; and their attempts to cover their behaviour when Gonzalo wakes up to foil their plans and the lack of any sign of remorse. Good answers were able to reflect on their sustained cynicism throughout the play and consider the language they used. Most recognised that there are differences in character between Sebastian and Antonio, despite the fact that they always appear together on stage. Equally, the fact that Prospero’s brother never repents of his sins is important to note as it adds an interesting ‘realistic’ twist to the theme of forgiveness. Shakespeare seems to recognise that some people are simply beyond the pale – Antonio’s assurance of good behaviour in future is only obtained by Prospero’s threat to disclose his attempted treachery to Alonso were he to sin again. Whereas good responses focused on both ‘memorable’ and ‘villains’, weaker responses described their villainy in quite general, narrative terms.

Question 9

Of those who chose this question, most were able to convey a sense of Stephano's ribald / drunken nature quite well, although some candidates were less effective in this respect. There was generally a relatively good understanding of his motivation to become king and make Miranda his queen. The best responses showed close awareness of text and character, for example having him sing a snatch or two from his song when he first enters the play, and were able to capture his voice with a sense of inflated and intoxicated self-esteem and entitlement; but many indulged in wild speculation involving drink, the creation of magnificent palaces and even invading Naples.

OSCAR WILDE: *The Importance of Being Earnest*

Question 10

This was a very popular choice, but it was not always well done. The obvious point of the triviality of the obsession with muffins at this time of supposed distress for the two men was made, but attempts to link this with satire on the aristocracy were not often helpful. There is undoubtedly some truth in this idea but only in the most general sense – assertions about the Victorian obsession with food (particularly as a substitute for sexual gratification) were not usually convincing. The vast majority of the candidates were able to comment on the content in terms of *what* makes the passage an amusing end to Act Two (the obsession with food and the christening), but far fewer candidates actually engaged with the language and explored *how* Wilde makes it amusing.

Question 11

This also proved a very popular choice. Better candidates recognised the humour in a character who makes such strong assertions which, upon closer examination, turn out to be completely nonsensical. One weakness was the choice of so many to overlook her disagreement and reconciliation with Gwendolen, which has so much to say about feigned politeness in respectable circles. Candidates should be aware of the danger of making Cecily representative of Victorian women in general. To call all aristocratic women 'empty headed' is rather sweeping – Wilde has to be given some credit for creating a delightfully eccentric character in her own right. Stronger candidates were able to draw on some of the following: she is not the demure, innocent young girl she is supposed to be; she has a strong will of her own and detests the studies laid down by her guardian and Miss Prism; and she is intent on capturing the first eligible man she can find. However, too many candidates simply narrated character sketches and needed to consider Wilde's methods in greater detail.

Question 12

This was the least popular question on the text. The best answers showed clear understanding and awareness of character and plot. Some took Miss Prism into the room and gave a summary of the final scene from her point of view; however, few managed to sustain a really convincing voice, instead relying on quotation cohabiting uneasily with modern vernacular such as 'I really fancy Dr Chasuble'. However knowledge of narrative details was evident and most responses began to assume a voice.

Section B: POETRY

THOMAS HARDY: *Selected Poems*

Question 13

Of the questions on Hardy, this and **Question 15** were the most popular. Generally, candidates wrote with good understanding of these poems; what distinguished better responses were those candidates who were able to comment with precision on the effects of particular words / images / poetic devices. Most candidates demonstrated good contextual knowledge as far as Hardy's background is concerned. The same point can be made for all three questions: candidates might be advised to see the poem in terms of definite movements or phases to help them organise responses in a coherent manner, rather than simply work through each stanza.

The key words in **Question 13** were 'how' and 'moving portrayal of despair'. Good responses engaged with Hardy's use of language, such as his use of contrasting imagery – the allusions to nature and to death, the broken rhythm and rhyme, and were able to show how this conveyed his feelings. The initial shock and sadness of her death is followed by an inability to believe that his wife has gone. This leads on to memories

of happier times before returning to the stark realisation that he must now face life alone. Weaker responses tended to work through the poem, paraphrasing the quotations (thus showing some level of understanding of ideas) but comments lacked the necessary focus on the question.

Question 14

Not many responses were seen to this question. Good answers focused on ‘feelings’ about the passage of time, rather than just describing how time passes by. *In Time of the Breaking of Nations* reflects on timelessness in a way; some situations go on in the same way from one generation to another; the allusion to war suggests that despite the chaos it creates, time will heal. Some candidates knew the context of the poem and the significance of its title. Stronger responses showed understanding of the poem’s ideas that even though war might kill the individuals, the rural way of life goes on, love endures.

Question 15

Of those candidates who chose this question, most wrote on *I Look into My Glass*. There were a few candidates who clearly misunderstood the term ‘glass’ thinking it was a drinking glass, but most candidates were able to make some relevant comment about Hardy’s ‘feelings about growing old’. It is a short poem, and those candidates who were able to focus clearly and in detail on the effects on particular words and phrases fared better than those who relied on paraphrase. Good answers were able to comment on Hardy’s use of language: for example the double meaning of ‘wasting’; the accumulative effect of the negatives of ‘undistrest’, ‘cold’ and ‘lonely’; the assonance and internal rhyme of the final stanza that links words such as ‘make me grieve ...shakes this...frame’ together; while showing just how this conveyed his grief, sadness, loneliness and despair. Less successful answers still managed to show some general understanding, but frequently failed to comment on how Hardy felt about his ageing.

SONGS OF OURSELVES: *from Part 4*

Question 16

This was probably the most popular poetry question, and it inspired many different theories about the source of the narrator’s happiness! Perhaps the best answers were those that recognised that the poem works on several levels. Most candidates were able to identify the celebratory nature of this poem, and how the imagery employed by Rossetti supported that feeling. The candidates who backed up their assertion that her happiness is rooted in spiritual re-birth did so by pointing out the pattern of images with religious connotations. Some candidates showed rather limited understanding of imagery such as ‘halcyon sea’, generally coupling it with ‘rainbow shell’ as biblical imagery. Many however were well-prepared in this respect. Regardless of the specific source of her happiness, it was important to define it in some way. Consideration of individual images out of the poem’s overall context cannot really be appreciated in terms of effectiveness, relevance or appropriateness unless we know this.

Question 17

This was also a popular question and candidates had clearly been taught a variety of interpretations, some more convincing than others. Nevertheless, most were able to show a reasonable knowledge and understanding of the poem and the idea that fear does not negate admiration. Successful responses paid some attention to points such as the description of the snake in the second stanza, and the impact of the metaphorical language; were able to comment on the contrasts between warm and cold. Less successful candidates tended to provide a broad discussion about man and nature, some focusing entirely on the poem as an allegory of the racial tension between the Aborigine and the white man, while exhibiting an uncertain grasp of some poetic devices used - especially personification and metaphor.

Question 18

Very few candidates attempted this question, and most with limited success. There were a few candidates who answered on *The Horses* by Muir, a different poem that is not in the anthology. The question asked candidates ‘how’ the poets communicated a ‘vivid sense of the past’. Most candidates showed some knowledge and understanding of each poem, but few managed to relate this to the task. In *Horses*, candidates might have considered the interplay of verb tenses within the poem, and the references to childhood whilst exploring the imagery of the poem. In *The Planners*, candidates needed to select the material carefully: too many concentrated on the present day and showed understanding of Cheng’s criticisms of the planner’s destruction of the past and history, but closer attention to how this communicated a

vivid sense of the past was needed - for example the contrast between imagery related to the present and what it implies about the past.

Section C: Prose

TSITSI DANGAREMBGA: *Nervous Conditions*

Question 19

The context is that Babamukuru has returned to the homestead with the news of Nhamo's death. The sadness of the actual event is confirmed by the reactions of the parents and his other siblings. There was much to be said on the mother's reaction in particular, both to this news and the later revelation that Tambu is to take his place at the mission, and on Tambu's rather more muted and nuanced reaction to news of her brother's death, as well as her sense of triumph at the end of the passage. This was the most popular of the three questions on *Nervous Conditions*. The key phrases in the question were 'how' and 'so sad and yet so hopeful'. Quite a few candidates' responses were very imbalanced, or only dealt with either 'sad' or 'hopeful'. Many were keen to go beyond the extract and discuss the significance of the opportunity being offered to Tambu in the thematic context of the novel, without really exploring the grief that is so palpable at the funeral first. In particular, the ability of the narrator to create such a visual picture was recognised and commented on by comparatively few candidates. Most responses focused on the content and meaning of the passage, rather than explore how Dangarembga's writing makes the moment both sad and hopeful.

Question 20

Candidates were asked which male character they found 'most admirable'. Babamukuru was the more popular choice, but some saw Mr Matimba as admirable, as his help for Tambu is not affected by family ties or responsibilities. On the surface, Matimba was the more straightforward option, as he makes few appearances and there is no ambiguity about his essential goodness. However, more scope was available for candidates who opted for Babamukuru: the most able candidates were not only well aware of the negative aspects of his character, but also recognised that even he is torn between his cultural heritage and the westernisation of his family. A few made the case for Chido for his attempts to mediate between Nyasha and her father, and his concern for his mother's well-being. It could have been argued that none of the male characters in the novel is presented as admirable, but very few candidates took this view.

Question 21

Relatively few answers were seen to this question. Candidates were asked to write the thoughts of Tambu's mother after Babamukuru has just driven her back to her home after the birth of her son Dambudzo. She will certainly be pre-occupied with the baby, particularly as he is her only surviving male child and may well recall what happened to Nhamo. It is possible she will be thinking about her sister Lucia and the job Babamukuru has found for her, for which she expresses her gratitude. She may be contemplating her own forthcoming wedding, which Babamukuru has arranged for her. She could well express mixed feelings about Babamukuru and his wife, and she may be regretting leaving baby-clothes behind her in her excitement. Responses were often very generalised and narrative; although most showed some general knowledge and understanding of some of the events, very few managed to capture her excitable and emotionally volatile voice.

ANITA DESAI: *Fasting, Feasting*

Question 22

The context is that Arun has just arrived at the Patton house following an unsuccessful stay in a room near the university, and with the help of an introduction from Mrs O'Henry. Mrs Patton shows a fascination for his different culture, especially the food, seizing the opportunity to 'mother' him and to make him feel at home. Her interest is focused on food, and her realisation that he is vegetarian is dramatic to the extent that she wants to join in. Arun is uncomfortable, even oppressed by her interest. The question asked candidates what Desai's writing made them feel about Mrs Patton at this moment. There was a tendency here for candidates to provide extensive narrative accounts and not address the question in detail. However, good candidates attempted to create an argument grounded in the text and often provided a balanced viewpoint. It was, however, clear that many candidates had not worked out their feelings about Mrs Patton beforehand. The complexity of her character was appreciated by relatively few; many applauded her friendliness towards Arun (and her kindness) without making any connection between this and the dysfunctional relationship she has with her own family. In many ways, she lives in her own head just as much as Arun does. We do not

know what she feels about any aspect of her own life, except that she does not want her sister to have a bad impression of her. If she allowed herself to dwell upon her life, we imagine she might be desperately unhappy.

Question 23

This was a very popular question, and candidates clearly felt very strongly about MamaPapa and their success as parents. There was much that could be, and was, said. For example, their intentions are honourable, but some of their children get more attention than others. Arun, being the only boy, gets all of the attention but he also gets all of the pressure. Uma is used pretty much as a skivvy; they see no point in continuing her education. They go to great lengths to arrange marriages for the daughters, but do not show much discrimination in selecting husbands; although Papa does rescue Uma from her unhappy marriage. Candidates engaged enthusiastically with this question and a surprising number were totally supportive of MamaPapa, believing that, despite their shortcomings as parents in some respects, they only had their children's best interests at heart. The best answers were able to offer a more subtle verdict on this – that, beneath the facade of looking out for their children, they were perhaps really only protecting their own best interests. Also to be commended were those responses that took the balanced view of suggesting that the decisions taken by MamaPapa in the course of the novel were totally in line with their cultural conventions and beliefs.

Question 24

The relationship between Uma and Aruna has always been slightly awkward, in that Aruna has shone in every respect beside Uma. In previous visits she has tended to dump the children on Uma and go off visiting her friends. Dinesh is a rather sinister child, as shown by the shooting of the pigeon, his blame of Uma, and the mysterious activities with Panna. Good answers showed empathy for Uma, and captured her feelings which would probably be mostly those of relief. Weaker answers merged all the visits of Aruna and her family into one and became rather too narrative, giving Uma a voice that was too outspoken and confidently articulate.

KIRAN DESAI: *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*

Question 25

Candidates were asked to show how Desai made the experts consulted by the family so ridiculous. There was much to comment on: the energetic good sport Dr. Banerjee with his conventional medicine, who in the end can only declare Sampath crazy; the Tibetan who thinks that sea mice and other non-existent animals might do the trick; the nature doctor who prescribes starvation as a cure; and finally the holy man, who ironically is perhaps the most sensible in his down to earth comments and advice. This was a popular choice and the overwhelming majority of candidates were able to produce reasonable responses, but few were able to go beyond this. As ever, the way to gain higher marks lay in the willingness to explore language in detail. Few highlighted the exchanges between Mr Chawla and the holy man, and how comic effect is gained from the rapid-fire questions which become increasingly bizarre in nature and the largely monosyllabic responses: no comment is given about how the questions were asked, it is left to the reader to imagine this ridiculous but deadly serious conversation. What unites all the 'experts' is their absolute confidence in their own wisdom. Stronger answers were able to identify Desai's use of caricature and satire: weaker answers retold the extract.

Question 26

Desai presents Mr Chawla as endlessly self-important, directing his family like a policeman. He is full of bustling, often mindless, energy but without an ounce of imagination. He is greedy enough to reverse his view of Sampath once he has recognised his son's potential as a cash cow. Candidates who chose this question were able to show a range of knowledge of his character, but responses were often lacking in the necessary focus on how Desai ridicules him through her descriptions of his behaviour. The best engaged with her writing and satire, but most retold what he did without drawing any relevant conclusions.

Question 27

This was a popular question, and most candidates who chose to answer on it did quite well. Sampath would clearly be feeling horror at the idea of being married to anyone as far from his dream of a woman as his father's choice. He would be shuddering at the memories of her ice cold touch, and her scrawny form pointing out the chasm between her and the dream of his ideal woman. No doubt he would be ever more

certain that he must stay where he is. Stronger candidates engaged well with this task, capturing Sampath's voice, which ranged from panic to a state of ecstatic dreaminess. Those who were less successful with his voice nonetheless showed relevant knowledge of the context, and conveyed his revulsion at his father's choice.

GEORGE ELIOT: *Silas Marner*

Question 28

The focus of the question was on how Eliot vividly reveals the relationship between Squire Cass and his sons in the passage. There is evidence of the irascibility of the Squire, the excessiveness of his reactions, and the way in which the sons conspire to avoid their father's anger. We see Godfrey's feeble attempts to placate him – and his failure to achieve anything, as well as the Squire's lack of faith in him. There is dissatisfaction expressed towards both sons. Good answers were able to comment on this and see implications such an uncaring and inconsistent father, and two sons (perhaps even four) who have turned out badly as a result; they were also able to comment on the way in which Eliot makes the dialogue so revealing. Some mistakenly saw the Cass family as aristocracy, and asserted that Eliot was making a political point about the ineffectiveness of the ruling class.

Question 29

A pity more did not attempt this question, as most candidates who chose it did reasonably well. Dolly is a delightfully positive character who has significance in the overall context of the novel in terms of the rehabilitation of Silas Marner. Her unfailing kindness was recognised and illustrated by all candidates who responded warmly to it. Candidates were generally able to cite instances of Dolly's helpfulness to Silas Marner, and others could additionally discuss her significance in the novel. The best answers focused on showing how Eliot's writing makes Dolly 'so memorable' to them, for example through direct description and authorial comment, and instances of Dolly's religious fervour and her behaviour, which reflect her Christian principles. Some responses showed knowledge, but were restricted to a general character study with no personal response to her character or reasons why she is 'so memorable'.

Question 30

Nancy is a good and pragmatic character. She has just learnt from Godfrey of his parentage of Eppie. No doubt she will be thinking of own childlessness, and Godfrey's earlier suggestion of adoption. It is possible this will affect how she feels towards Godfrey at this moment. However, her thoughts about the way forward will no doubt be influenced by what she knows of Silas and his relationship with Eppie. The best answers showed understanding and knowledge of its context, but not many managed to capture the sheer horror Nancy must have felt upon her husband's confession of his earlier transgressions. It must have been a real struggle for her to reconcile herself to this. Having done so, however, the prospect of adopting Eppie must have seemed like a God-sent opportunity to her but, again, candidates did not always convey this excitement. There were some extremely creative expressions of emotion which really bore little relationship to either the events of the novel or Nancy's character.

SUSAN HILL: *I'm the King of the Castle*

Question 31

At first, this moment appears to be a decisive turning point. For the first time Hooper cringes in the face of Kingshaw's violence, instead of the other way round. Kingshaw feels totally superior even when he gives the immediate advantage away. It is possible that the reader feels Kingshaw to be terribly mistaken. The best answers were those that recognised that, by clinging to his sense of morality and goodness (despite his initial outburst), Kingshaw is doomed to lose the battle in the long run, as Hooper is constricted by no such concepts. They also engaged with Hill's writing, making the point for example that the dramatic quality of the short sentence 'But Kingshaw could feel him, listening' towards the end of the passage creates a terrifying, almost tangible sense of fear for the future.

Question 32

This was a question that was well answered on the whole. Better responses were those that looked for the fine detail when describing incidences of Hooper's cruelty. Closer examination of fewer of his actions was more effective than a simple overview of his wickedness. What is truly terrifying about him is the sense of omniscience in Kingshaw's mind, and this was recognised by many. The majority of candidates were able to

cite relevant instances of Hooper's behaviour and treatment of Kingshaw. The strongest responses showed awareness of Hill's methods, and engaged with language effects. There was also some understanding of Hooper's psychological abnormality illustrated by most by his reaction to his grandfather's death and to Hooper's suicide. The key phrase was 'such a terrifying figure', and those who focused their response on this did best.

Question 33

Not many candidates chose this question. Fielding's voice would be quite matter of fact. He might be considering whether it is worthwhile remaining friends with Kingshaw if that is to be his attitude. He no doubt would be thinking about the relationship between Hooper and Kingshaw, and life at Warings. He might also be thinking about Kingshaw's behaviour: why did he refuse to come home with him and Hooper, and why did Kingshaw seem so angry and upset? Better responses showed an understanding of this and knowledge of the context; there were, however, quite a few candidates who clearly found it hard to decide what he would be thinking about his new acquaintances, and instead wrote entirely creative responses describing daily life of the farm with no reference to what had just happened.

from *Stories of Ourselves*

Question 34

This story appears to have been greatly enjoyed by candidates, although some viewed the father particularly harshly. He was often seen to care about nothing but money, and some went as far as to say that the boy hated him. The text itself suggests nothing more than a retrospective irony, with some gentle mockery. The best answers were those that were able to stand back from the content of the story, and recognise that this story is not told by a 13 year old boy but by an adult looking back to the time when he was at that age. Thus the humour is refined and filtered through an adult's eyes. The 'how', 'vivid' and 'amusing' was explored quite effectively by stronger candidates, but there was a tendency with weaker responses to simply assert that a point was 'amusing' and retell the extract without making any comment on Lurie's writing.

Question 35

This was a popular choice with candidates, but many struggled to focus clearly enough on just what makes the story so shocking, relying instead on a narrative summary of the entire story. There was much that could be commented on such as the deliberate targeting of the man by the horse; the potential violence throughout; and the nightmarish quality of the writing. The best did do this, engaging sensitively with Hughes' writing, recognising the 'man versus nature' symbolism at the heart of the text. Most candidates were able to respond at some level, commenting on the strangeness and terrifying portrayal of the horse. Stronger candidates considered the man's expectations in returning; the part played by descriptions of the weather and landscape; even going on to consider different possible perspectives of the narrative. The best focused on 'so shocking', whereas some focused instead on the psychology of the protagonist or the significance of the horse, without much or any reference to the question.

Question 36

Candidates had the opportunity to capture Lord Emsworth's style of speech, that of an aristocratic buffoon; they also engaged with the humour of the situation. There were many highly entertaining responses. One answer even had Lord Emsworth prevaricate on whether Donaldson's produced dog biscuits or cat biscuits. Whilst some candidates found it hard to sustain a developed response and the voice - wrongly supposing that Lord Emsworth might use such Americanisms as 'gotten' - most candidates were able to capture something of Lord Emsworth's self-centred view of the world; his obsessive concern for the pumpkin; and his basic stupidity. What is most clear is that the story is clearly a favourite.

LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

Paper 0486/13
Paper 13 (Open Books)

Key Messages

1. *In poetry questions meaning, significance and personal response need to be explored first, then how the writer uses language for effect to create that meaning.*
2. *Language needs to be discussed in prose extracts.*
3. *The discussion of punctuation, form and of stage directions in drama contributes nothing without reference to meaning.*
4. *There needs to be far more focus on the key words in a question. Words such as ‘explore’, ‘explore the ways’, ‘how’, ‘how far,’ ‘vividly’, ‘memorably’, ‘powerful’, ‘dramatic’, ‘moving’.*
5. *Quotations need to support points, not to be merely added. They should be relatively brief and integrated into the flow of the argument.*

General Comments

Prose questions were generally well answered, detailed and appreciative of themes and characters, with much personal engagement with the texts. Drama answers were, perhaps inevitably, mostly from a reader's perspective rather than an audience's. On the whole extracts were answered more competently than the discursive essay; this is because the extracts demand a closer engagement with language. There were some very good empathic answers with much textual evidence; weaker answers kept repeating the emotions of the character. Generally candidates did not include enough textual echo or reference to relevant details during their thoughts on the relevant moment. Sometimes the moment itself was not tightly enough focused upon. At times the character (such as Muni, in **Question 36**) was limited to repeating the same thing several times in the monologue.

Essay structure improves year on year. There are very few essays now which lack introductions and conclusions, linked paragraphs, and points supported by textual evidence; though there are still examples of formulaic introductions which contribute very little. For example, where candidates' essay structure was less effective, this was often because they were inclined to provide lengthy introductions; detailed paraphrase; unnecessary biographical accompaniment; and broad discussion of related social issues arising from text. Many candidates referred closely and regularly to the question, though some relied much too heavily on general and sometimes arguable assertions. As often, concise answers with precise points tended to score more highly than longer rambling essays

Plenty of candidates showed good knowledge and understanding of their texts, but a fair number of these candidates nonetheless produced limited responses because they overlooked the need to focus on an author's methods and techniques; the 'How' or 'In what ways' of the question.

The use of quotations could be improved in the work of some candidates. There was often a lack of connection between the point and the quotation as if the candidate had merely put it in because s/he remembered it, not because it supported the point being made. In the best answers, quotations were brief and integrated seamlessly into the argument.

We have argued for so long that candidates need to discuss language that now it has almost gone too far, with some essays about nothing else. In responses to poetry some candidates have written pages and pages of line-by-line paraphrase, or line-by-line identification of literary terms with no discussion of the meaning of the poem at all. All the sophisticated and complex language terms in the world do not compensate for lack of understanding. The mention of 'lexis fields' which add little to the candidate's understanding of poetry is particularly tiresome: "Drummer Hodge" has a lexis field of death..." And, as a corollary, as a way of tackling a poem, this clearly does not lead to the *personal appreciation* of poetry which we are looking for. Similarly the trend to write about punctuation has grown and is particularly unhelpful in commenting on passages from Shakespeare.

There were very few unfinished papers and very few rubric infringements. There was, however, a disturbing trend of informal language, as well as some Americanisation 'mom' and 'gonna', 'kinda'. There was also less use of quotational evidence and less accuracy when dealing with titles, authors and quotations.

The entry for this component was quite small, so it is not possible to comment on performance on all of the individual questions.

Comments on Specific Questions

Section A: DRAMA

ARTHUR MILLER: *All My Sons*

Question 1

At the beginning of the play the world seems peaceful, and the three men seem at ease on a beautiful Sunday morning. On the other hand, Keller is perhaps not fully at ease; he seems aware of his own ignorance and that the world has moved on. There is the fallen tree, which from the conversation seems to have considerable significance. There is the mysterious reference to horoscopes. Candidates seemed unable to discuss much of this extract, except for the tree symbolism and characters 'not looking up' as others entered. The strongest answers focused on Keller's concern about money and business, his traditional values, and his preference for the past. Many candidates understood foreshadowing techniques and wrote well about them. Very few candidates discussed the staging - the back yard that protects and the poplars that surround.

Question 2

Ann Deever might be thought a moving figure for the following reasons: she lost her loved one in the war, and she has fallen in love with his brother, who over three years has done little to suggest that her feelings are reciprocated. When she discovers her feelings are reciprocated, she meets Kate's opposition. Finally she discovers the truth about her father and Joe Keller, with all that means in regard to her treatment of her father and to her marrying into the Keller family. What the future holds for her must be very doubtful. Candidates worked well with Ann Deever, understanding that she is a moral guide; better candidates understood that she is flawed. Some candidates did not provide much quotational evidence for their assertions, and this led to a much weaker answer. Candidates were able to recall key moments in the play well, and how Ann remained central to these and to the conflict that runs through.

Question 3

Jim Bayliss is at this moment in a state of considerable perturbation. He is likely to be thinking about what he has heard from George; about the mood that George is in; about the effect that this will have on the Keller family and on Ann; and about what he is going to say to everyone, and his friend Joe in particular. There were so few answers to this question that it is not possible to make comments on performance.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Julius Caesar*

There were so few answers to these questions that it is not possible to make general comments on performance.

Question 4

This follows the meeting with Cassius and Casca on the occasion when Caesar was offered the crown, and immediately precedes the meeting with all the conspirators. Brutus has been unable to sleep. He is agonising over whether Caesar is a threat or not, and attempting to justify the assassination to himself. The letter helps to some extent to persuade him to go forward.

Question 5

Octavius is the peevish Schoolboy – he has youth but also determination, and is bent on revenge. Antony may appear to be just a limb of Caesar to start with, but his behaviour following the assassination shows much more conviction. They are both quite ruthless in their treatment of Lepidus. Cassius is biased against Antony from the beginning and the feeling is mutual.

Question 6

Cassius will be satisfied at the way the meeting has gone. He will be reflecting on the details – the issues of Cicero and the oath, and on the way in which he has managed to manipulate Brutus. He will be thinking about the way forward. He may be giving his opinions of his fellow conspirators, and his contempt for Caesar.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *The Tempest*

Question 7

The extract immediately follows the masque blessing the union of Ferdinand and Miranda, and represents an abrupt (and dramatic) change of mood. Some comment might have been made about the philosophical dimension of what Prospero says, and on the way Prospero excuses himself to Ferdinand. Ariel's description of how he has treated the conspirators was worthy of comment. There were few answers to this question, and most referred only to surface action.

Question 8

Miranda and Ferdinand fall in love at first sight. Miranda's inexperience of humans may account for this, and Ferdinand's distressed state of mind, supposing his father dead, may have made him particularly susceptible. Miranda attempts to defy her father, and Ferdinand accepts confinement and hard labour in order to be able to have some contact with Miranda, but the progress of the relationship is orchestrated by Prospero. There were few answers but these were answered rather well in terms of the relationship between Miranda and Ferdinand. There was too little negotiation with language to really reward candidates for a response to 'moving', however.

Question 9

Alonso believes his son may have drowned, and will be distressed and anxious to find him.

He may be thinking about the double loss of his now-married daughter. Given his state of mind in Act 2 Scene 1, he may even be wishing that the shipwreck had claimed him, too, as a victim. He may be thinking about the emptiness of his Neapolitan status compared with the loss he thinks he has suffered. Good answers achieved a convincing voice – grieving, regretful, possibly self-blaming, and desperate for some peace and quiet. There were too few answers to this question to make comment possible.

OSCAR WILDE: *The Importance of Being Earnest*

Question 10

Cecily appears the dutiful candidate but clearly is not, as the end of the extract makes plain. She knows exactly how to manipulate Miss Prism. Miss Prism is clearly much taken with Chasuble, and needs little encouragement to discover she has a headache and needs fresh air. What Chasuble feels is hilariously made plain by his unfortunate remark about hanging on Miss Prism's lips. Candidates struggled at times to discuss why humour is humorous. There was also much discussion on Gwendolyn's diary writing, but only in terms of a literal response rather than why it was funny or what Wilde's purpose was. Candidates made more reference to a modern interpretation than expected; this was not a useful discussion to offer. Most candidates were able to discuss why there was an amusing yet awkward moment with Dr Chasuble's metaphorical speech.

Question 11

Since this is such an open question, in the two moments chosen by the candidate there should be ample evidence of Wilde's humour and an understanding of why it is productive of laughter. Candidates on the whole did not use comedic terminology apart from 'irony'; there was much narrative response to this question since candidates struggled to analyse why Wilde's writing is humorous. Candidates also became confused about the plot and therefore spent precious time explaining what was happening.

Question 12

Algernon may well be in a state of some confusion, his happiness mixed with apprehension. He is likely to be thinking what a lively and beautiful girl has entrapped him, about the loss of bachelor status and all that incurs, and about the acquiring of a long lost brother, and the effect that will have on him. There were few answers here; most were unable to assume suitable a voice and it was particularly noticeable when informal language was used.

Section B: POETRY

THOMAS HARDY: Selected Poems

Question 13

The speaker in *On the Departure Platform* remembers the departure in great detail. The tone is nostalgic and romantic. He reflects on how life has changed/moved on, and is almost despairing in the final stanza. The imagery associated with the lover is particularly striking and worthy of comment. Quite a number of candidates saw the poem as being about the death of the loved one, and some interpreted it as being about going to war. Unfortunately in these cases the theories were not sufficiently backed up by textual evidence.

Question 14

The time of year and the coldness with the imagery of death and aridity reflect the poet's frame of mind. The thrush conveys optimism – singing despite its frailty – and suggests that there might be hope of something beyond this life: 'the blessed Hope'. Candidates really flourished with this question, and there was a real sense of engagement with the death imagery and the joy that came with the thrush.

Question 15

In *Neutral Tones*, the speaker is bitter and appears to have been betrayed. His lover is described in very unattractive terms and his life has been ruined. In *At the Word 'Farewell'* the ending is happier than in many of the poems, but the uncertainty of the speaker comes through vividly. The couple are on the verge of parting, but he tries to salvage the situation.

SONGS OF OURSELVES: from Part 4

Question 16

This was probably the most popular question on the paper. Candidates needed to comment on the anthropomorphism and speculate on the feelings of the cockroach. They might have commented on the question in lines 12 and 13 of the poem, and the poet's own answer to it. This question and poem allowed weaker candidates to flourish in terms of forming a clear argument that they could hang their analysis on. Unfortunately more able candidates rarely achieved high reward because they did not engage with language or with figurative terminology sufficiently. For more able candidates this was often their weakest answer.

Question 17

This question allowed for some interesting analysis at times, but some confusion at others. On the whole it was accessible for able candidates, but a surprising number of less able candidates also chose to answer on the poem. Almost all were able to see that it was about writer's block, but there were varying degrees of success in relating this idea to the imagery.

Question 18

Feelings of grief are shown in the speaker's apparently irresolute state at the start of the poem and the way in which he describes his physical reactions, for example his adoption of the foetal position. Some weaker answers focused on biographical details of Rossetti's life in order to explain his grief, and lost sight of the poem in so doing. There was some confusion about what the woodspurge symbolised and this, of course, was vital to an understanding of the poem. There was not enough reference to language on the whole for high reward.

Section C: PROSE

TSITSI DANGAREMBGA: *Nervous Conditions*

Question 19

The context is that this is Tambu's first day at the mission, and she is still discovering how different life is here from her life at the homestead. The naivety of Tambu's amusement at seeing her aunt use the tea-strainer reveals differences in values between homestead and mission. Life at the mission is relatively lavish, and this reveals the privations of life in the homestead more vividly. Tambu's mishap while drinking may be seen as amusing, as may Nyasha's boisterous exchange with her mother at the end of the extract. There were not many answers to this question, but of those, most were able to pick up on the contrast between the two places and they saw some humour in the tea-strainer.

Question 20

The question focuses on the varying effects of Babamukuru's generosity, and responses needed to concentrate more closely on the recipients than on Babamukuru himself. Some of those who benefit include Tambu, her older brother, her parents, Lucia, and the School of which he is headteacher. Candidates might have argued that Babamukuru's generosity benefits himself, by confirming his patriarchal role and boosting his self-esteem, but so few candidates attempted this question that it is not possible to comment.

Question 21

Babamukuru has been keen to deny that Nyasha needed psychiatric help, but has been persuaded by his brother-in-law. He may be torn between concern for his daughter's well-being, and his reaction to a challenge to his assumption that his word is law in his household. He is a conscientious professional returning to run his School – thoughts about his daily routine may feature. He will be deciding what to do about Tambu, who is a passenger in the car. He may be contemplating the future for Nyasha and for the family as a whole. Good answers will capture a voice conscious of his public image and dignity, but perhaps privately beginning to question previous certainties. Again there were few if any responses to this question.

ANITA DESAI: *Fasting, Feasting*

Question 22

The process that has been involved in bringing this marriage about should be dealt with briefly, though focus needed to be firmly on the extract. The marriage is completely joyless. The 'sullen' bridegroom and all his family who ignore Uma make it a particularly miserable occasion. The journey is uncomfortable and disgusting, and Uma is treated like a piece of luggage and ignored. Then her husband abandons her. There were some strong answers which explored the extract in detail, and engaged with the language and imagery. Sympathy for Uma was very clear and most candidates wrote very fluently about the ways in which her expectations of marriage have been dashed.

Question 23

The completely different climate and appearance of the country make Arun uncomfortable. He is unhappy in the 'dorm' where nobody communicates with him, and he is unable to engage. He has a sense of alienation in the Patton house – nobody has much to do with him apart from Mrs Patton, whose attentions are smothering. He can not eat the food. He has to escape by jogging. This question inspired candidates to explore the wider issues which Desai is critiquing, as well as showcasing a good knowledge of the text. Many candidates chose moments where Aran was isolated and lonely, and were able to provide a debate as well as some expertly chosen evidence. Stronger candidates were able to engage with the political and social debate, whereas weaker candidates found plenty to talk about in terms of food, family and friends.

Question 24

Melanie is a very unhappy girl with an eating disorder, and it appears that she is aware of what she is doing. We should expect reflections on her dysfunctional family, her thoughts about food, and on Arun's presence in the house. This is not the only time that Arun comes across her in such a state, and the night-time incident may be referred to. Melanie is not very articulate and her 'voice' will reflect her rather taciturn and sullen character. There were a few examples of answers to this question and they usually demonstrated understanding of this tortured soul, of her self-loathing and hatred of her family. Some seemed to think that she is desperate for her mother's approval, but this does not seem to be altogether borne out by the text.

KIRAN DESAI: *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*

Question 25

The key words in the question are 'mysterious and amusing'. There is either the ludicrousness, or the mystery, of the single guava fruit guarded by the monkeys and Sampath's final escape. Amusement comes from Mr. Chawla, who has never shrieked with such despair (his cash cow has vanished); from poor Miss Jyotsna, who has lost her 'Baba'; and from the desperation of the search. The passage is lively, has symbolism and chaos, and candidates were able to explore these expertly.

Question 26

There are a number of vivid descriptions of Shahkot's noise and heat, its chaotic services and its lack of any apparent order. However, some aspects of it could be seen as part of a vibrant life in which nothing is done by half, and in which the streets pulse with colour and theatre. Very few candidates chose to answer the question, but those who did were able to do so very well.

Question 27

Hungry Hop is likely to be thinking how besotted he is with the girl who bit off a part of his ear and that he has never met such a resolute young woman. He may be incredulous that such a girl is attracted to him and having continual doubts whether he, of all people, can possibly continue to keep the attraction of such a forceful personality. He will be waiting in agony for the next missive from her.

GEORGE ELIOT: *Silas Marner*

Question 28

This was a very popular text, and a very popular question. Sympathy comes from the way in which Silas is regarded by the villagers, from his loneliness, and the way in which it makes money a substitute for friendship. The broken pot is significant. The reasons for his arrival in Raveloe might be mentioned though they are not the focus of the question. Good answers explored the writing in some detail – the physical descriptions, the sensuousness of the treatment of the guineas etc. Candidates were able to discuss Silas's physical reduction, loss of faith, lack of love and his relationship with inanimate objects well.

Question 29

This question offered a completely open choice. Suitable moments might be various occasions in the Rainbow Inn, the party at the Red House, or its aftermath. The village people might be either the ordinary folk or those of higher birth. What was not required was straight narrative or description; good answers explored character and the way in which it is revealed through speech and through authorial comment.

Question 30

Godfrey announces the discovery to Nancy in Chapter 18. He would probably be thinking about the reasons for the draining of the stone-pit 16 years after the disappearance of Dunsey, and the circumstances of Dunsey's disappearance. He will be shocked and horrified, and thinking about the implications for himself, Nancy and Marner. There were so few answers to this question that it is not possible to make comments on performance.

SUSAN HILL: *I'm the King of the Castle*

Question 31

Hill memorably conveys Kingshaw's terror in every physical detail and through his thoughts. Flight endows the crow with frightening power to attack at will. Hooper watched and watched, almost as if the crow is an extension of his malevolent personality. Many candidates were able to engage in discussion about Kingshaw's mental and physical anguish, as well as the horror and pursuit of the crow. The most able candidates made strong links between the crow and Hooper. Essays were even and thorough.

Question 32

On the one hand, Mrs Kingshaw might be felt to warrant sympathy because she is a lonely widow and she has a child to bring up whom she appears to love. She does not have a strong character and is often fearful of the future. On the other hand it might be felt that she is a stupid and vain woman, and that her pursuit of a stable future for herself makes her a dreadful parent. She re-orders reality to suit her own desires, and fails utterly to take seriously her son's unhappiness. She sides with Hooper and she is directly responsible for Kingshaw's suicide. This question inspired some extreme responses. Some candidates were very strongly of the opinion that Mrs Kingshaw was not a sympathetic character. Others seemed to think that they were only able to discuss the issues which made her sympathetic. The strongest answers came from a tracing of her character throughout the text.

Question 33

Kingshaw is likely to be thinking with trepidation that yet again he and his mother are on the move, and that once more he is going to have live in a stranger's home with his mother as a virtual servant. Even worse, there is going to be boy of his own age in situ, with whom he will be expected to be friends - but at least after a time he will be able to escape back to his boarding School. There were more empathetic answers on this text than on any others. Unfortunately candidates did not attempt to assume a voice and there was some Americanism and informal phrasing. Some candidates wrote about after their arrival at the house – the wrong moment.

from *Stories of Ourselves*

Question 34

The question is focused on the descriptive qualities of the extract, so good answers will explore the language and imagery in detail. They needed to comment on the build up to this moment - the excitement of the girls and their preparations; the visual impressions – the light and colour and contrast; the movement; and Leila's feelings. There were only a few answers, but they generally understood what was expected and picked out relevant details and attempted to comment on them.

Question 35

Feelings may vary from complete disgust, to admiration, to sympathy. Good answers evaluated and supported a carefully constructed argument. The callousness of T and his disinterest in empathising with Old Misery was commented on, as was his background, his ability to lead the other boys and the complete lack of anything personal in his destructiveness. Few good answers were seen to this question, surprisingly. Many candidates got bogged down in the theory that T is a war-damaged child, and paid scant attention to what he actually says and does.

Question 36

Sam would be feeling sadness and disappointment and possibly anger, though there is no real evidence for that in the text. He would be thinking about his feelings for Sophy over the years, and her refusal to marry him, and about her husband and her son. He would be regretting missed opportunities, especially in the light of his business success. There were very few, if any, attempts at this question.

LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

Paper 0486/02
Coursework

Key messages

Tasks for critical essays must direct candidates to consider the ways in which writers achieve their effects, if candidates are to meet the assessment criteria for the higher bands.

Empathic tasks must focus on a key character at a precise moment in the play or novel chosen by the candidate.

Teacher annotation of candidates' work enables Centres to justify the award of a particular mark and is an important part of the dialogue between a Centre and the Moderator.

All relevant paperwork, including mark sheets and candidates' individual record cards, must be checked for accuracy before submission.

General comments

Moderators commented on the high quality of much of the work they read. There was much evidence of Centres taking the opportunities offered by coursework to develop their candidates' wider reading. Many Centres allowed their candidates a degree of choice in their selection of texts (especially true of poetry and short story texts) and tasks. Even in Centres where candidates responded to the same tasks, it was rare to see candidates producing formulaic responses, making the same points and citing the same references, which would be against the spirit of coursework.

The vast majority of Centres complied with the syllabus requirements. It should be remembered that candidates need to write about a minimum of two poems or two short stories in poetry and short story assignments. The strongest poetry assignments demonstrated a sustained engagement with the ways in which poets achieved their effects. Such responses managed to do this without taking refuge in the logging of literary devices. Sometimes candidates were hampered by the need to compare their chosen poems. Comparison is not a requirement of IGCSE, and indeed the marking criteria do not reward it. Moderators reported that too often a Centre's own requirement for comparison led to rather contrived essays, that dealt with two poems in alternate paragraphs in a way that prevented the candidate from constructing coherent and cohesive responses to poetry. The comparison too often got in the way of sustained critical analysis.

One of the syllabus requirements is that candidates show evidence of studying the whole text. Tasks focusing exclusively on one extract from a drama or prose text are, therefore, not permitted.

Centres with more than one teaching group are advised to discuss the choice of texts and the wording of tasks at the start of the course, in order to ensure that they enable their candidates to meet the relevant assessment criteria. This will allow any problems to be resolved long before the internal moderation of coursework marks. At Band 2, candidates should 'respond sensitively and *in detail* to the way the writer achieves her/his effects'. For this reason, tasks need to be framed in such a way that candidates are directed to explore the writing. The Set Texts examination papers provide examples of tasks that enable candidates to meet the relevant criteria. It is encouraging to note that very few tasks were set which explicitly treated the characters as real-life people (thereby neglecting the role of the writer). There were, however, occasions when tasks were set that did not enable candidates to explore the writing: e.g. 'Untangling the relationship between Sampath and his family [in Kiran Desai's *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*]'. For this task, candidates enjoyed the focus on Sampath and his relationships with father, mother and sister, but the task did not invite them to consider the writer's effects. A more appropriate task might be: 'In what ways does Desai memorably convey the relationships between Sampath and his family?'

A minority of candidates offered an empathic response as one of their assignments. It should be remembered that successful empathic responses create a voice that is clearly recognisable for the chosen character and the precise moment.

When considering the appropriateness of tasks, teachers should refer to the guidance and examples of good (and bad) tasks found in the 0486 Coursework Training Handbook, which can be found on the Teacher Support Site.

For the majority of Centres there was clear evidence of a conscientious approach to internal standardisation. Often comments on the assignments themselves or on the individual record cards helpfully illustrated the debates that had taken place within a Centre. Where the original teacher marks are moderated, it is always helpful to have a concise comment giving the reason. It is worth stressing again that focused ticking, marginal comments and summative comments (the latter at the end of assignments or on the record card) are an **essential** part of the dialogue between the Centre and the Moderator. Such comments also form an important part of the dialogue between teachers *within* Centres before the coursework is submitted. Ticks should indicate valid, thoughtful, sensitive points made by the candidate. Brief comments should note strengths and weaknesses, drawing at least in part on the wording of the band descriptors. In this way a meaningful dialogue can take place about the award of any particular mark, with all interested parties focusing on the detail of the assessment criteria. By contrast, assignments bearing no teacher annotation or comments unrelated to the assessment criteria (e.g. 'lovely', 'nice', 'good') do not assist the moderation process.

Finally, the majority of Centres are to be congratulated on the efficiency of their administration. The following list provides a summary of good practice found in Centres which manage coursework effectively:

- texts and tasks are in keeping with syllabus requirements
- tasks are worded carefully in order to allow candidates to meet the assessment criteria
- all teachers tick and annotate assignments, making reference to the wording of the assessment criteria, thereby ensuring a dialogue within the Centre and between the Centre and external moderator
- concise comments are provided to justify marks changed by the internal moderator
- sample and paperwork are checked carefully before dispatch to Cambridge
- the deadline for submission is met.

LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

Paper 0486/31
Alternative to Coursework (Unseen)

Key Messages

- Attention to the question and bullet points will help candidates to shape a response which is critical as well as personal.
- Candidates should allow time for planning, to gain an overview of the text before writing.
- Candidates should practise good quotation technique: quotations should be short, embedded within a sentence, and followed by comment on the effect of the writing.
- There is no reward for simply identifying critical or linguistic features of the writing: marks are awarded for comment on their effectiveness.
- Candidates need to consider what are meaningful comments on structure and form, and what are not. Comment on form needs to be related to meaning.

General Comments

The majority of candidates responded positively to the choice of unseen poetry and prose in this session. Answers showed engagement, and often well-practised critical skills. The literal meaning of the texts caused no difficulties, and the complexity of sub-text allowed plenty of opportunities to explore possible implications. It was clear to Examiners that many candidates had a genuine appreciation of language and its effects, and were able to engage with unseen writing with varying degrees of insight but a consistent spirit of genuine enquiry. Most also found something to say about the human elements of the texts, and their relationship to life and experience, which showed personal response to ideas and attitudes as well as language. Candidates often say they enjoy this paper; Examiners enjoy the freshness and variety of responses and find this a good test of the range of literary skills developed by candidates, both critical and empathic.

Many impressive answers were seen which showed linguistic sophistication, and perceptive response to the writer's use of language. There were, however, some over-lengthy answers which rarely rose far above the level of extended paraphrase, with excessive amounts of quotation. There were also weaker responses which spent too long identifying features of the language or structure of the text, without considering their meaning or effectiveness. Thus, attention to detail was sometimes at the expense of the meaning of the whole text. This was especially evident among candidates who used checklists or acronyms to structure their answers, instead of reading through the whole text first and considering the question carefully. Questions always encourage candidates to look at 'how' a text works, and the bullet points can be very helpful in structuring a response which can explore both content and techniques.

The key advice is to spend a little more time planning and structuring answers. Well-organised responses were usually evident from the first sentence, which had something to say about the text as a whole, communicating an overview of both its content and the reader's reaction. Candidates with an understanding of the direction of the whole text were better able to comment on how individual parts related to the whole. If they worked through the passages in sequence, they were more likely to be able to appreciate the developing effect which writing has on the reader than if they dotted about the text looking for particular linguistic features – and sometimes not finding them.

Candidates should avoid the phrases 'basically' or 'trying to say': these phrases usually preceded paraphrase. The texts do not need translation, but candidates are instead encouraged to explore their implications and effect on the reader. This is best achieved through short, frequent, embedded quotation followed by comment on the writer's choice of words or details. Identification of semantic fields or rhetorical devices ('anaphora' was especially popular this year) does not in itself lead to higher marks: the marks come from comment on the effects of features of the writing, and how they open up the 'deeper implications' of the text. Comment on language should be followed by a link to the meaning of the text.

Some candidates felt they were required to write lengthy paragraphs on verse form, stanzaic structure, sentence length, or narrative perspective. It was difficult to give much reward to these paragraphs, if candidates did not link these observations to either the writer's purpose or the impact of the writing on the reader. Again, the key message is that comment on form and structure needs to be linked to meaning. One way to do this would be to encourage students to highlight the effect of individual rhymes, stresses or sentence forms and comment on their particular effect, instead of generalising.

Appreciation of the generic features of poetry and prose is very helpful if linked to response to the question. As the question asks 'how', candidates should practise exploring different possible interpretations, exploring alternative meaning through phrases such as 'this suggests' or 'this might represent'. An exploratory and interpretative approach is what Cambridge most encourages as 'personal response': it is not necessary for candidates to use the first pronoun liberally in their answers, or to write about their own personal experiences, but a good answer will conclude with an individual evaluation of how the text achieves its impact on the reader. There was evidence that candidates are being well-prepared by using past papers, with feedback from previous reports. This should be supplemented by introducing candidates to an anthology of poems and passages which will familiarise them with different poetic genres and periods, and with different forms of narrative and descriptive writing. Preparation of the latter fits well with preparation for Cambridge First Language English.

Comments on Specific Questions

Question 1

Sean O'Brien's poem 'Dignified' proved a very popular choice in this session. The subject matter clearly appealed to candidates, some of whom wanted to write about their own memories of the 2012 Olympic Games. The question did ask for attention to the poet's thoughts and feelings, and good candidates were aware that the expression of ideas and emotions in verse is not always straightforward. Some justifiably read the poem as an ode to the dignified, while others found more satirical and undignified elements in the worship of elite athletes by 'us who follow': both interpretations are valid.

Most candidates noted the form of the poem, divided into five stanzas; many noted the pentameter rhythm and some commented upon the irregularity of the rhyme scheme. Some made ingenious connections between the five stanzas and the five Olympic rings, but only a few attempted to explain the effect of verse form on the interpretation of the text. More attention to rhyme, and the ways in which it makes connections and contrasts which are often striking or memorably incongruous – 'tracks/heart attacks/fax', 'ease/TVs/please' – might have been more profitable. Certainly candidates should be encouraged to reflect on the sounds as well as the meaning of words in poetry.

The title of the poem was often ignored. When candidates did reflect upon the significance of the title, opinion was divided as to whether the poet was demonstrating his respect for the athletes by suggesting that they are 'dignified' or whether the title was ironic and the poet was drawing attention to the excessive reverence poured upon mere 'game'-players by the sheep-like followers, 'left waiting at the start'. Certainly reflecting on the relationship between text and title can help to construct an overview of a poem.

Most were able to see how the poet's use of pronouns created a clear divide between the elite athletes and 'us', and recognition of tone here and whether there was irony in the poet's use of hyperbole or his pejorative view of the couch potatoes who worship breathlessly at the audio-visual shrine of these god-like beings tended to distinguish the stronger answers. Weaker answers might not have seen that the athletes also pound through 'grim estates' and their names are 'ordinary', even if their deeds are signed in gold.

Some candidates made mistakes because they read the poem line by line: even though they spotted the presence of 'enjambment' and 'caesura', they sometimes did not see that meaning also moves over the line ending. Thus it was often not understood that the athletes are the subject of the lists in the first two lines, or that they all 'deny / What all the gods insist on, that we die'. Grammar and syntax yield meaning in poetry, just as in prose.

Nevertheless, many were able to identify excitement and pace in the lists, repetitions and polysyndeton, and noticed how the poem moves from the preparation for the games towards their finishing line. Candidates rarely found the mention of Greek Gods a barrier to understanding: this seemed to encourage reflection on fate, mortality, and making history. Others were interested in references to the media and the more modern cult of celebrity, questioning whether you really could 'change the world by mastering a game'. Good responses linked this idea to other phrases which stressed the global impact of 'life itself becoming art',

noting the ‘planetary roar’ of the admiring audience, and the ways in which sport can perhaps transcend time as well as geography. Its purpose, claims O’Brien, ‘stays essentially the same’.

Interesting comments by candidates included the following on ‘outstrip the bullet and the fax’: “it shows that their career will outlast the outdated fax” and “the fax was intended as an electronic alternative to a courier, and now it is being outdone by what it was meant to replace.” This supplemented observations that outstripping a bullet might signify the ability to defy death, or that sporting achievement could overcome the enmities of war. Many noticed the effect of the comma after ‘Breathless, on a billion TVs’: one said it “forces a kind of panting, mimicking the ordinary people’s excitement and even lack of fitness”. Some noticed this line was shorter than others, as if we are gasping, when it is they who should be breathless from their exertions.

Good responses were thus able to identify a degree of humour or satire in the poem as well as exploring ways in which the athletes might be competing or gambling in order to ‘stake everybody’s claims for more’ – the insatiable desire of the public for new records, greater physical feats, and more defiance of the laws of physics.

The third bullet point, and the final stanza, proved to be discriminators between the effective and the convincing responses. Some weaker responses omitted it altogether, or read it as simply saying that we will all die. Stronger answers showed clearer awareness of syntax, and that the final lines are a rhyming couplet. The completion of the race grants the athletes a form of immortality, inscribed in gold as a record. Good responses saw the language of finality - ‘bow’, ‘farewell’ and ‘wake’ - but also the presence of timing instruments, all of which testify to the athletes’ triumph over time. Some seemed to struggle with the idiom of ‘taking liberties’ but many noticed that the swimmer seems to achieve the impossible when she ‘escapes her wake’, and appreciated that the ending of this poem is intended to transcend logic and reason, even that of the gods themselves. Strong responses saw this in the context of the history of the Olympic Games and what they have now become, as a memorable global event with a legacy that seems to transcend the momentary achievement of individual success.

Question 2

The extract from Polly Sampson’s *The Man Who Fell* proved intriguing and interesting to a wide range of candidates. Weaker candidates found it accessible and usually engaged easily with the surface narrative, although some struggled to make their way through the entire passage. More gifted students found plenty to explore in greater depth, whether through the details of the description or the symbolic possibilities of the figurative language. The extract comes from close to the beginning of a short story, and stands on its own as a piece of retrospective recollection. Unfortunately some candidates could not resist shaping a narrative of their own: Julia and Julian never meet again (how, in that case, did he know her name?), he or she are attacked by the hawk, he saves her life or he kills the hawk or the hawk kills her. Some misread ‘copse’ as ‘corpse’, to turn the passage into a murder mystery. Candidates should remember that texts often just mean what they say, and that Examiners use the rubric to clear up any uncertainty about characters or the narrative.

The focus of the question was clearly “on Julian” in order to draw attention to the fact that although the passage is narrated in the third person, it is very much from Julian’s perspective. It was therefore a mistake to place too much emphasis on Julia, or on the hawk, rather than the way Julian sees them. Some candidates took this subjective element to the narrative too far. While they were right to pick up ways in which Julian seems to be the girl of his dreams and that he seemed to have ‘wished her into being’, there was some over-reading of the final paragraph when he ‘watched her disappear’ and ‘felt like a sleepwalker’ in order to argue that her appearance had only ever been a dream. Such responses needed to show awareness of the more realistic elements of descriptive detail of setting, girl and hawk in order to have access to higher marks, and the bullet points helpfully guided candidates towards these descriptions. Attention to individual words was the mark of a good candidate. One wrote: “the word ‘alighted’ makes it seem like he had been on a journey, and has finally reached his destination: Julia.”

The bullet points also helped candidates to see the emotional shifts of the passage from Julian’s initial delighted surprise, to his rather tentative verbal contact with the girl and her harrier, to his feelings of being mocked by nature as he loses touch with her without having said what he wanted to say. Stronger responses took a variety of approaches but all showed engagement with how Julian encounters what one candidate called “...a drop-dead gorgeous woman out in the open countryside with a demonic hawk.” Candidates enjoyed the physicality of the description of Julia, set against open and dramatic countryside. Many felt the ‘chaotic gust’ of wind showed he was being impelled toward Julia by forces beyond his control, and some contrasted the clichéd elements of her description – ‘long hair flying’ – with details which

suggested a more individual impact on Julian, such as her ‘muscular brown calves’ and eyes an ‘astonishing Siamese cat blue’. Several saw the comparison to Minerva (‘sprung fully formed from his forehead’) and a number were interested in the way in which he seemed to conjure her up, or that she had been ‘summoned’ as if by magic (‘Ta-da!’), in ways designed to surprise the reader as well as the narrator. She seemed to some a goddess presiding over a wild country, or the product of his ‘gin-soaked hangover’. Very strong responses were alert to the sexual tension and desire conveyed through Julian’s ‘raptor’s gaze’.

Indeed, a distinguishing mark of strong responses was their awareness of the parallels between Julian and the hawk. Both are ‘falling...like a heart that had leapt free’, hurling themselves ‘straight at her from the heavens’. They share not only a gaze, but a heartbeat: ‘the beat of his wings was the beat of his blood’. They are also clearly rivals for Julia’s attention: strong responses noticed that Julian thinks the hawk is jealous and possessive, and has ‘psychopathic eyes’. Some candidates noticed the violence of the hawk’s movements, and several felt this might be a metaphor for the violence of Julian’s desires. There was excellent commentary on the hawk’s name, Lucifer, and ways in which he might resemble a fallen angel, linked to heavenly imagery surrounding Julia, or the idea that Julian himself has also fallen. Some thought Julia on the side of the angels, while others wondered if she was associated with satanic forces. Some criticised the way she seemed to tease him, or how he objectified her through his gaze.

All this is probably less important than the excited language of movement which surrounds the whole encounter: ‘leap’, ‘alighted’, ‘sprung’, ‘falling’, turning and turning’, ‘hurling’, ‘billowing’, ‘reeling’, and finally Julia’s lolling retreat. It is a very physical and raw encounter, as visceral as the ‘pink and stringy’ meal which Julia feeds to the hawk. Many noticed the little details of Julia’s appearance which make Julian’s heart even more tender, and which he feeds off.

Several noticed that nature - which appears to be Julian’s ‘mischievous’ ally, bowing him towards Julia, and revealing more of her distracting beauty - appears to turn against him. Girl and hawk disappear among the tress of the copse, and mounds of grass seem to leave him ‘stumbling’; time slows, the wind drops and the bird seem to mock his unsuccessful attempts to contact her again. Here observations about personification or the alliterative harshness of the ‘crows circling’ with ‘callous shouts’ could successfully convey the ways in which Julian feels the world has turned against him, and made him feel insignificant. Most candidates were able to understand how the passage conveys both the power of love at first sight, and the powerlessness of the passive lover, unsure if his feelings are in any way returned. Julian no longer resembles a predator, but rather helpless prey. Julian is no longer moving, and comes to a stop ‘leaned against a tree trunk’. Some noticed that the passage begins and ends with the echoing vastness of the ‘Downs’, and commented on the immensity of nature and its ability to dwarf human desires. In sum, candidates found much in the passage than perhaps we anticipated, and showed the value of really close reading and attention to the patterns and implications of language.

LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

Paper 0486/32

Alternative to Coursework (Unseen)

Comments on Specific Questions

Question 1

In general terms, candidates responded extremely well to Anthony Thwaite's poem "The Bonfire" and the task of explaining how vivid impressions of the poem's subject were conveyed to the reader. Almost all candidates were able to use the bullets to structure a response to the "narrative" of the poem, and most were able to produce some focused, analytical comment on the poet's portrayal of the bonfire. There were many well-developed responses to the features of the writing and the effects achieved, often supported with diligent, thorough exploration of textual detail. In many cases, of course, such analysis of method, language and effect could have been extended, with obvious opportunities missed by some such as, for example, the auditory as well as visual imagery at work in the "crackling roar", or the "hissing" of the fire in the sibilant word choices.

Understandably, perhaps, many candidates are less confident in discussing the more formal, structural elements of a text than the connotations of particular words, but those who are able to engage with how the poem works as a poem, for instance, are likely to score highly. The use of enjambment, for example, particularly in its unusual use between the stanzas, was identified by a number of candidates. With features of this kind, though, it is the quality of comment on effect that is key in terms of accessing the higher mark bands. Many wrote with some plausibility about how such movement across the lines might suggest the continual, seemingly unending work undertaken to try to get the bonfire to light. The most able candidates were able to discuss how enjambment subtly adds, perhaps, to the growing sense of mystery as we, metaphorically at least, delve deeper into the dark, obscure heart of the bonfire. Others suggested how it helps build a barely tangible sense of momentum, a slowly gathering pace which may be dramatically charged, suspenseful, ominous or a combination of these qualities. Some identified perceptively how enjambment can produce an awkwardness and uncertainty of both rhythm and meaning and how a certain tension can be created through this. Able candidates linked such comments to the shorter lines and more frequent caesuras in the final stanza as intensifying this effect on pace and mood. In contrast, while many candidates painstakingly detailed the poem's slightly irregular rhyme scheme, most laboured to find significance as to how such irregularity or complexity helped shape meaning. While the rather strained nature of the comments here certainly manifested a conscientious desire to grapple with the poem's form, in this particular case it might have been better to have used the time to concentrate on those features of the poem where effects and significance were more clear cut. Some candidates, on the other hand, appeared to think that there was no rhyme or, indeed, rhythm, the two terms being apparently interchangeable.

Perhaps the most significant discriminator was the candidates' response to the personification of the fire. The great majority recognised this feature although some merely stated its presence while others simply commented that this made the fire seem "as if it were alive" and left it at that. While weaker candidates tended to skim over the details, stronger ones noted, for instance, the extended, complex nature of this personification and the way in which it takes a number of forms, which appear to shift or mutate as the poem develops. They also began to explore thoughtfully and imaginatively the specific connotations and suggestions of the anthropomorphism on a number of levels – emotional, psychological, existential and so forth. So, to begin with, the bonfire is presented as a sick person, a stubborn old invalid, perhaps, or a frustrating, sulky teenager. Some saw it as sad and depressed, perhaps insecure and uncertain of its own worth or status, fed as it is on unwanted detritus, on "shaken weeds" and "old spoil". Some sensitive readings saw it as a corrupted being, metaphorically as well as literally, "sodden with rot". As the poem develops, indeed, the persona of the bonfire takes on darker tones and hues as it becomes, at turns, a deviously recalcitrant, teasingly taunting and increasingly powerful adversary. Always, however, good interpretative responses such as these were founded in the precise language of the text – "coughed fitfully", "spat", "slumped back", "glum", "choked at heart", "heavily sullen" and so on. Good readers are attentive to the nuances of tone in a text and it was pleasing when candidates appreciated something of the dry, rueful humour of the speaker's "voice" in his presentation of the bonfire in the first two paragraphs. Indeed, it is this

receptiveness to tone and mood that is so often a key discriminator between those scripts which move towards a sensitive and perceptive appreciation of the text and of authorial intention and those that are led down more unproductive, less convincing interpretative tracks.

The great majority of candidates responded to a greater or lesser extent to the drama of the final stanza and needed little encouragement to comment on the “disturbing images” of the fire as prompted by the third bullet. The use of simile in the comparisons with a volcano and a Gehenna was noted by most and many went on to a compelling analysis of the dense and powerfully suggestive use of language here, whether that was in the creation of an ominous mood of foreboding, the developing sense of scale or the emphatic alliterative rhythms. The idea of the bonfire having transformed itself into, or rather as revealing its true identity, as a monstrous, perhaps evil being was developed by many. A number suggested the presence of religious overtones, perceptive responses alluding to the speaker’s earlier reference to the “ritual” use of petrol as now, in hindsight, suggestive of an act of worship, appeasement or propitiation. In the best responses, again, there was this ability to see how the poem works a complete entity, through the identification of parallels, echoes and points of contrast (the latter not quite being synonymous with “juxtaposition” as an increasing number of candidates appear to think). As a general rule, candidates should be encouraged always to focus particularly on openings and endings. Here, the final word “fed”, now in the context of perhaps murderously insatiable and voracious desires, acts as an ironic counterpoint to the use of the same word in the very first line, where, in contrast, a sense of futility and dormancy are the keynotes.

Quite reasonably, candidates feel that it is incumbent upon them to identify or construct a “deeper meaning” to a text and to a poetic one, in particular. Surely no poet worth his or her salt would write a poem *just* about a bonfire? A number perceptively registered the use of the definite pronoun in the title as indicative as suggesting that, from the outset, there was something significant or, indeed, profound about the poem’s subject. Some of the most potent and convincing lines of thought had an ecological bent and centred around man’s mutually destructive relationship with nature or with his inability to deal with the mysterious and powerful elemental forces present in the latter. Explicit or implicit was often the idea of the poem as a form of allegory or fable, a darkly cautionary tale, hinting at the apocalyptic retribution to be suffered by man for his hubristic attempts to control or demean the natural world. At times, however, such lines of interpretation were too sweeping, fanciful or far-fetched to be really helpful in elucidating the poem’s possible meanings (one response had the newspaper being fed to the bonfire as representing the latter’s sinister desire to assimilate information in the form of the modern media as part, no doubt, of its megalomaniacal ambitions for man’s eventual overthrow). A number of essays were unbalanced, with the prolix development of largely unsupported, speculative lines of interpretation at the expense of a careful reading of the actual words themselves. At other times, there was the relentless imposition of a single, dogmatically held interpretation into which the words of the poem were skewed and contorted to make fit. It is certainly true that Thwaite’s poem appears pregnant with richly symbolic undertones, yet, ultimately, these remain ambiguous and suggestive in nature. Candidates should be encouraged to recognise such ambiguity and mysteriousness, to be tentative perhaps in their positing of any one “decoding” of all the manifold subtleties and ironic nuances in a text such as this, and, above all, always to root their interpretation in the detailed textures and structures of the writing itself.

Finally, with reference to the point just made and also to the use of enjambment discussed earlier, one of the most valuable and fundamental skills which candidates can be taught is to be able to understand and follow the syntax of sentences and how they work, particularly within a poetic context. This may seem an obvious point to state but if candidates misunderstand the meaning of individual sentences, it is difficult for them to establish the foundations of a convincing reading of the text as a whole. A frequently observed example of such misunderstanding centred on the quotation of the words “grimly determined not” and an attempt to elucidate the meaning of these words in isolation, without recourse to their continuation at the beginning of the next stanza “To do away with itself.”

Question 2

Candidates responded in a lively, warm and enthusiastic manner to the prose extract taken from Margaret Atwood’s short story *Underbrush Man* and to the task of analysing how the writer creates an entertaining portrayal of the character of the teenage girl, Miriam. Attitudes towards the character largely divided into two “camps”: on the one hand, those who disapproved of Miriam, her rudeness and disrespect, and who were shocked but also intrigued by her; on the other, those who wholeheartedly liked her and sided with her against her parents who were perceived to be authoritarian, interfering and irritating. Such was the degree of empathic engagement and identification, indeed, that a significant minority of candidates failed to get much further than developing “a (barely) relevant personal response” at the expense of an analytical discussion of the writing itself.

Good responses often began by positing the idea of Miriam as, for all her quirkiness and idiosyncrasies (or partly on account of these?), a representative figure, a “typical teenager”, at least on one level. Able candidates sometimes went on to explore how the writer plays with what might be seen as a somewhat stereotypical portrayal of both what might be termed the teenage “mind-set”, and of the invariably conflicting dynamic between the adolescent and her parents. Many of the multiple comic effects of the passage are rooted in reader recognition and in this perhaps somewhat knowingly familiar, even clichéd presentation of the three participants. En passant, it was pleasing when candidates focused, if only briefly, on the quietly rueful and sardonic comments of the no doubt long-suffering father, a figure largely overlooked by many - his gratifying failure to wear the lurid spandex shorts aside.

A key discriminator was the candidates’ ability to identify the nature of the narrative perspective or point of view employed by the writer and to comment with accuracy and precision on the effects of its use. Some erroneously stated that the passage was written in the first-person, while others correctly identified the use of third-person, omniscient narration but went on to say that it was this approach *in itself* that allowed us into the inner world of Miriam’s thoughts and reflections – ignoring the fact that the reader is deprived of such privileged access in the case of the two adults. Strong candidates, on the other hand, recognised that we see events from Miriam’s perspective or through her eyes, but that she and the narrator are not one and the same. The ablest then went on to discuss how, for all her mocking comments directed towards the adult world, it is in fact Miriam who is the prime object of the writer’s satirical focus. Many candidates observed that, for all her intelligence and sharpness of tongue and wit, she is still a young, perhaps rather naive girl and that she is not as mature as she’d like to think, and that she does need her parents. Some recognised that Miriam is concerned very much with what is “cool” (or not) but, ironically, fails to see that she herself is very much dominated by peer pressure, and that this in itself is not really very “cool”. Similarly, is there that much difference between the affectation of the middle-aged joggers’ earphones and lime-green outfits and those conventional and mildest symbols of teenage rebellion, the tattoo or belly-button ring (to be purchased, no doubt, with the pocket-money provided by her ever-so conventional parents...)?

In the same vein, it was the higher band responses that recognised that the conversations between Miriam and, primarily, her mother are not only “reported” but perhaps are constructs of Miriam’s vivid and playful imagination or fantasy as much as of her memory of familiar and oft-repeated exchanges. There were perceptive comments on how Miriam herself “writes the script” of the arguments in her head, a comedic dialogue of retorts and counter-punches in which she is always the quickest and the smartest and in which her penchant for caricature, exaggeration and drama (or melodrama) is given free rein. On the other hand, of course, Miriam is tellingly blind as to how she might be seen by others as spoilt, unreasonable and rather pretentious. To put it simply, the writer signals pretty clearly to the reader not to take her protagonist’s observations and assessments at face value.

The majority of candidates were not able to “read between the lines” in this sort of way but many were still able to access the higher mark bands through a thorough, conscientiously developed comment on the details of the passage and, crucially, on its language. While this was a question which did not lend itself so obviously to the close exploration of language and technique, as compared with a poem bristling with imagery, for example, good responses did examine Miriam’s energetic, lively and varied use of language – “cool” short expressions, casual slang, use of hyperbole and dramatic ‘ohs’ and exclamation marks – and her sarcastic wit. Her strategic and ironic use of quite sophisticated and idiomatic French to counter and undermine her mother’s disapproval merited some scrutiny, as did her parents’ response to this. A key skill in working with the detail of the language is, of course, the ability to isolate and integrate into one’s commentary such sweepingly damning epithets as “pathetic”, as directed here towards the efforts of the joggers, themselves representative of the adult world at large. Such a technique is invariably far more effective in eliciting sharp, focused comment on word choices than wholesale, lengthy quotation. Incidentally, in relation to those said joggers, a few observant responses spotted that Miriam was too inhibited to actually name the euphemistic “bulgy parts”, again suggesting that she is not quite the bold, unfettered and grown-up young woman that she might like to think herself to be.

Again, strong candidates showed that they had a good “ear” and had the ability to register the different nuances of tone in the writing. The ablest identified the fact that the humour of the passage resides, to a degree, on the understated, quietly ironical nature of its narrative voice and its dead-pan delivery (“Miriam saw a movie like that once” or “She’s saving up”). On a more straight-forward level, successful readings picked up on the fact that while the relationships depicted certainly display much mutual annoyance, irritation and exasperation, they do not appear to be founded on a violent dislike or even hatred, as some candidates suggested. Much of the humour lies, in fact, in the reader’s recognition of the gap between Miriam’s dramatized perception of her misunderstood and unappreciated existence and the reality of what we see as a family household full of loving concern, warmth and security.

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Weaker responses failed to engage in such close reading of language and tone and did not get much further than one might call a re-creative paraphrase of the narrative of the piece. As indicated earlier, many wrote a lot on a reaction based upon their own personal experience or those of their friends, and some entered into a diatribe against either parents and adults in general or, interestingly, against their fellow teenagers. Either way, many such responses quickly became generalised and detached from the text itself. There is always the danger with the prose piece that the writing becomes elided and is, in a sense, taken for granted by the candidate as just a transparent medium or vehicle for the meaning. Just as in preparation for working on the poetry, candidates must be trained to attend to the writing, its features, forms and structures, and to analysing precisely *how* the author shapes and crafts his or her material.

LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

Paper 0486/33
Alternative to Coursework (Unseen)

Key Messages

- Attention to the question and bullet points will help candidates to shape a response which is critical as well as personal.
- Candidates should allow time for planning, to gain an overview of the text before writing.
- Candidates should practise good quotation technique: quotations should be short, embedded within a sentence, and followed by comment on the effect of the writing.
- There is no reward for simply identifying critical or linguistic features of the writing: marks are awarded for comment on their effectiveness.
- Candidates need to consider what are meaningful comments on structure and form, and what are not. Comment on form needs to be related to meaning.

General Comments

The majority of candidates responded positively to the choice of unseen poetry and prose in this session. Answers showed engagement, and often well-practised critical skills. The literal meaning of the texts caused no difficulties, and the complexity of sub-text allowed plenty of opportunities to explore possible implications. It was clear to Examiners that many candidates had a genuine appreciation of language and its effects, and were able to engage with unseen writing with varying degrees of insight but a consistent spirit of genuine enquiry. Most also found something to say about the human elements of the texts, and their relationship to life and experience, which showed personal response to ideas and attitudes as well as language. Candidates often say they enjoy this paper; Examiners enjoy the freshness and variety of responses and find this a good test of the range of literary skills developed by candidates, both critical and empathic.

Many impressive answers were seen which showed linguistic sophistication, and perceptive response to the writer's use of language. There were, however, some over-lengthy answers which rarely rose far above the level of extended paraphrase, with excessive amounts of quotation. There were also weaker responses which spent too long identifying features of the language or structure of the text, without considering their meaning or effectiveness. Thus, attention to detail was sometimes at the expense of the meaning of the whole text. This was especially evident among candidates who used checklists or acronyms to structure their answers, instead of reading through the whole text first and considering the question carefully. Questions always encourage candidates to look at 'how' a text works, and the bullet points can be very helpful in structuring a response which can explore both content and techniques.

The key advice is to spend a little more time planning and structuring answers. Well-organised responses were usually evident from the first sentence, which had something to say about the text as a whole, communicating an overview of both its content and the reader's reaction. Candidates with an understanding of the direction of the whole text were better able to comment on how individual parts related to the whole. If they worked through the passages in sequence, they were more likely to be able to appreciate the developing effect which writing has on the reader than if they dotted about the text looking for particular linguistic features – and sometimes not finding them.

Candidates should avoid the phrases 'basically' or 'trying to say': these phrases usually preceded paraphrase. The texts do not need translation, but candidates are instead encouraged to explore their implications and effect on the reader. This is best achieved through short, frequent, embedded quotation followed by comment on the writer's choice of words or details. Identification of semantic fields or rhetorical devices ('anaphora' was especially popular this year) does not in itself lead to higher marks: the marks come from comment on the effects of features of the writing, and how they open up the 'deeper implications' of the text. Comment on language should be followed by a link to the meaning of the text.

Some candidates felt they were required to write lengthy paragraphs on verse form, stanzaic structure, sentence length, or narrative perspective. It was difficult to give much reward to these paragraphs, if candidates did not link these observations to either the writer's purpose or the impact of the writing on the reader. Again, the key message is that comment on form and structure needs to be linked to meaning. One way to do this would be to encourage students to highlight the effect of individual rhymes, stresses or sentence forms and comment on their particular effect, instead of generalising.

Appreciation of the generic features of poetry and prose is very helpful if linked to response to the question. As the question asks 'how', candidates should practise exploring different possible interpretations, exploring alternative meaning through phrases such as 'this suggests' or 'this might represent'. An exploratory and interpretative approach is what Cambridge most encourages as 'personal response': it is not necessary for candidates to use the first pronoun liberally in their answers, or to write about their own personal experiences, but a good answer will conclude with an individual evaluation of how the text achieves its impact on the reader. There was evidence that candidates are being well-prepared by using past papers, with feedback from previous reports. This should be supplemented by introducing candidates to an anthology of poems and passages which will familiarise them with different poetic genres and periods, and with different forms of narrative and descriptive writing. Preparation of the latter fits well with preparation for Cambridge First Language English.

Comments on Specific Questions

Question 1

The poem 'At Blake's Lock' by Claire Dyer proved the less popular option on this year's paper, perhaps because the North American setting of the prose extract was more familiar to candidates entered for this variant paper than the more English setting of the poem. Nevertheless, candidates who attempted it found plenty of opportunities to comment on the poet's vivid descriptive writing and strong sense of place. The sensuous calm and dream-like beauty of the setting is increasingly associated with an encounter with another person to whom the poem is addressed, and a moment in life when time seemed briefly to stand still before rushing on. Some candidates understood the importance of imagery describing the water and its sound and movement; others struggled a little with the idea of a weir and the small scale of the English riverside scene, and wanted to imagine something more dramatic, with waterfalls and exotic natural accompaniments. Nevertheless, most understood that the poem was about memory, and that it might be about love, and youthful desire, and therefore found plenty to connect with.

This is a text which does not have a clear narrative, but yields plenty of insight to the sensitive reader alert to the ways in which each of the senses is appealed to, and to the development of the poet's thoughts and feelings. The bullet points, if used, were a helpful guide to the scene setting, the personal impact of the memories, and the concept that those ideas develop: as 'forgotten' images are recalled and savoured, the poet then remembers. The final stanza is a contrast to what has preceded it. Instead of a series of stanzas made of visual images which run into one another, the final stanza stands alone as a complete sentence. This stanza is about an individual and personal memory, not now 'forgotten' but about the poet 'and you'. The conjunction and pronoun make up the memorable and vivid final words of the poem and carry strong emphasis. It is always a good idea to achieve a strong understanding of the final lines of a poem or extract before beginning to write, so that the direction of the writing and how to write an appreciation of it are clear from the outset. This text gradually recovers memories in order to reveal what is 'weir-real': by the end of the poem the atmosphere is no longer dreamy and timeless but real and specific – a 'rush'. The turning point is the description, in the penultimate stanza, of time resting 'on a blade edge, / unblemished, cloud-light.'

Good responses were sensitive to the sound effects, visual images, and the increasing intensity of expression. They also showed understanding of the structure and development of the poem integrated throughout their answers. Most candidates understood that more was required than narrative paraphrase, and took note of how punctuation and stanza form can aid understanding. Diction, rhetoric and imagery were explored, not in isolation, but connected to interpretation and the poet's viewpoint

Many looked at how the poet expresses the sounds, sights – 'the green of it' – and smells of the river scene. There was sensitive commentary on the effect of enjambment to create a visual sense of 'the launching / of birds', and 'the reach / of trees'. Fewer were aware of the ambiguity of the word 'reach', although many commented on how personification vividly brings the scene to life. The 'heron's / plastic watchfulness' was not so well understood: many wanted to use the adjective here to introduce an element of (more familiar?) artificiality. Better responses realised that the heron adds further colour and gentle movement – an alliterative 'feather-flick'. Only a few candidates noticed the accumulation of hyphenated words and

compound adjectives: ‘branch-dipping’, ‘pillow-soft’, ‘mirror-darts’, ‘white-blinded’, ‘cloud-light’ and finally ‘weir-real’. Is this to emphasise a sense of connection, or to highlight that individual words are not enough to capture the complexity of the scene and the poet’s memories?

Good responses saw the significance of ‘quiet, / secret dreams’; some suggested that this was the landscape of the subconscious, inhabited by half-forgotten senses and memories. The imagery of ‘the scoop of oars’ and ‘glide and scull of boats’ adds movement to the scene, and it is at this point that perceptive readers noticed that those dreams are shared and the first person plural enters the scene. Although their eyes are closed they seem to be in the light, and able to see the meaning of time. A number of good answers focused on the adjective ‘unblemished’ to suggest that the poem recaptures a memory of innocence, and presumably of youth. It was the way the poem recaptures youthful dreams and memories in a sensuous and beautiful way which seems to have appealed to candidates, and produced fresh and lively responses much enjoyed by the Examiners.

Question 2

The prose extract comes from the short story *All the Years of Her Life* by the Canadian writer Morley Callaghan. Most candidates recognised the North American, and specifically New York, setting and appreciated the clarity of the narrative, and that this was a pivotal moment for Alfred. For many, the narrative of a teenage protagonist seeing the error of his ways for the first time was appealing. They appreciated that Alfred is not only the focus of the question, but that what we see is presented from his point of view, even though the narrative is in the third person. The rubric helpfully provided the necessary narrative context, allowing candidates to concentrate on thoughts and feelings in the extract.

Good candidates appreciated that the passage is in several sections: indeed it is often a good tip to advise students to divide prose passages into three or four sections. Initially the mother is seen as ‘stern’ and strong, stunning Alfred into silence. He is afraid of her grim expression and refusal to communicate, and she rejects his ‘old, blustering way’. Later, back at home, he looks closely at her, and then listens to her activity as he goes up to his bedroom and finds ‘admiration of her strength and response’, looking back with awe at the way she got him out of trouble. The third change, which candidates were encouraged to notice by the second bullet point, is when he sees her from the kitchen door, and for the first time realises her age and vulnerability. For the first time, he feels the guilt and shame which he explicitly denied earlier in the passage. He realises that he bears some responsibility for her ‘frightened, broken face’. It makes him think again about all the times he has been in trouble before, and we have a strong hint that things will be very different in the future: ‘at that moment his youth seemed to be over.’ There is very little dialogue in this passage, and much more is implied than explicitly stated, so good responses needed to be alert to the descriptive details and what they revealed about characters’ emotions.

The mother’s silence and refusal to accept Alfred’s promises are both highly expressive. So too are her ‘long, firm stride’, her grim stare, and her evident anger, as she speaks ‘bitterly’ and ‘snapped’ at Alfred. Her anxiety and fear take longer to emerge, because Alfred can not see them, and does not initially understand that her distress comes from fear about his own future.

Weaker responses to this question did tend to take a summary-based or narrative approach to this task, almost as if it were a language exercise. Some did not take advantage of the opportunity to write about word choice or sentence length, or the creation of an internal drama and tension through the portrayal of Alfred’s responses to his mother’s words and actions. Good responses were aware of the importance of Alfred’s perspective from the beginning, and had a sense of the structure of the whole extract. Once again, an overview of the development of the whole text assisted candidates to make more perceptive comments on individual parts of the extract. The focus of the third bullet point, in particular, was strongly on Alfred, and how the writing conveys his feelings about what has just happened, with awareness that those feelings rapidly change.

Although at first he tries to cover any sense of guilt at losing his job and getting in trouble with bluster, his mother refuses to engage in such a dialogue – “Have the decency to be quiet” – and makes it clear that this is the culmination of a whole series of similar incidents from which she has had to extract him. Several candidates noted that her harshness when she says “Why do you stand there stupidly” and her sending him to bed like a naughty child can be offset by her kindness in hiding the incident from Alfred’s father.

Alfred’s ‘wonder and kind of admiration of her strength and repose’ was noted: this is not quite a turning point, but it shows more respect from Alfred than he has so far shown any adults. We are told he felt ‘a pride in her strength’ as he looks back at how she dealt with his angry employer. This shows at least the beginning of an ability to connect with and reflect on others, which is a more adult response than Alfred’s

selfishness and denial earlier in the passage. When he says to himself “Gee, I’d like to tell her she sounded swell” that shows he wants to communicate with her in a more adult way, even if he does not really know how to do that.

The turning point, and it is always a good idea to look for such a shift in a piece of narrative prose, comes when he goes downstairs to talk to her, but is expressed through description rather than dialogue. He does not engage with her directly, but by looking at her he finally realises how she truly feels about his transgressions. Some readers realised earlier than Alfred what his mother’s true feelings were, picking up her tiredness, distress, and the fact that she was so concerned that she had rushed out ‘only half-dressed’ under her coat. It is only now that Alfred sees his mother as a person, rather than as someone to be feared or admired, and reviews what has happened in the past in the light of this understanding. He has for the first time learned to empathise with another person, a crucial and potentially permanent change.

Many candidates were able to empathise with the moment when Alfred seems to grow up by noticing his mother’s ‘frightened, broken face’, and that her real emotions might be very different from the strong front which she had presented to the world. The description, from Alfred’s point of view, of her trembling hands and ‘lips groping loosely’ show the physical impact of her disappointment in him. As he understands her distress, and her fears, Alfred reviews everything that has happened and sees it differently. This time, the reader should feel that when he says it would not be the same story again, he means it. The writer conveys this through phrases such as ‘at this moment his youth seemed to be over’. Strong responses showed understanding that the repetition of the image of the trembling hands shows the impact of that image on Alfred: he understanding his mother’s vulnerability, how she cares for him, and that she is ageing and will not always be strong for him. Sensitive and successful answers appreciated that descriptive details mark the way for an emotional journey which the protagonist is on throughout this passage, and were able to give due weight to each stage of that journey. Such strong answers do need planning: they need not be very long, but there has to be clear distinction between narrative paraphrase, which gains relatively few marks, and the analytical attention to the significance of descriptive details which will lead to a mark in the top three bands. Examiners were pleased to be able to reward a number of strong, sensitive, and empathetic readings.

LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

Paper 0486/41

Paper 41 (Closed Books)

Key messages

The following are necessary for success in this component:

- Poetry: explore meaning, significance and personal response then show how the writer uses language for effect to create that meaning.
- Prose extracts: always discuss language.
- Drama: discussion of punctuation, form and of stage directions should always be tethered to meaning.
- Focus on the key words in a question.
- Quotations should support points and be integrated into the flow of the argument.

General comments

Prose questions were generally well answered, detailed and appreciative of themes and characters, with much personal engagement with the texts. Drama answers were often, inevitably, from a reader's perspective rather than an audience's. Close engagement with the texts was achieved much more frequently with the extract questions and good responses covered numerous points, showing the entire piece had been read.

There were some very good empathic answers with much textual evidence. Generally candidates did not include enough textual echo or reference to relevant details during their thoughts on the relevant moment. Sometimes the moment itself was not focused on with sufficient tightness.

Essay structure improves year on year. Most responses have introductions and conclusions, linked paragraphs, and points supported by textual evidence though there are still examples of formulaic introductions which contribute very little. Less effective essays had lengthy introductions and relied too much on detailed paraphrase, unnecessary biographical detail and broad discussion of related social issues. Many candidates referred closely and regularly to the question though some depended much too heavily on general and sometimes arguable assertions. As often, concise answers with precise points tended to score more highly than longer unfocused essays.

Many candidates showed good knowledge and understanding of texts and the best focused on an author's methods and techniques, the 'How' or 'In what ways' of the question.

Quotations should support the point being made. In the best answers, quotations were brief and integrated seamlessly into the argument.

In poetry questions particularly, candidates should avoid paraphrase or line-by-line identification of literary terms with no discussion of the meaning at all. Merely rehearsing sophisticated and complex language terms does not demonstrate understanding or personal appreciation. Similarly the trend to write about punctuation has grown and is unhelpful in commenting on passages from Shakespeare.

There were very few unfinished papers and very few rubric infringements.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Drama

ARTHUR MILLER: *All My Sons*

- 1 This was a popular question and there were some good attempts to 'explore the ways', though some candidates struggled to identify them, citing stage directions, dialogue and the characters themselves. All concentrated on Keller, with a little on Ann and Chris. Candidates might have explored Keller's pride in his humble background and being a self-made man, mixed with awareness of his educational limitations. A good differentiator was whether candidates saw the deeper implications behind Keller's words. There is more to his offer to Deever than simple goodwill and his anger over Ann's rejection of her father reveals his own fears. Good answers were perceptive and though they relied to some extent on hindsight, showed understanding of how an audience would react to the implications of what is being said without knowing the outcome. Weaker answers were not focused on the passage and spent too long on generalities and paraphrase.
- 2 There were many points of view, all supported, with the more successful attempting a balanced response and differentiating between mother and wife. Most candidates made the point that in refusing to accept Larry's death Kate stops the family from moving on and that she fails to appreciate Chris and his need to live his own life. She appears to offer little support to her husband, particularly at the end of the play although it could be argued that she has good reason for much of the above, in that she alone in the family knows her husband's guilt. She can hardly live with that knowledge, except by believing that her son is still alive and was not a victim of her husband's disgrace. At the end of the play she is the one who gives maternal comfort to her remaining son, Chris, and encourages him to go forward.
- 3 Chris is clearly in a state of anxious excitement. He cannot be sure that Ann will accept his proposal, though he hopes the fact she is coming suggests that she is likely to. He knows what a momentous step this will be to take in regard to his parents, particularly his mother. He wants to stay in the firm but cannot be sure this will be possible. This was the least popular question of the three but the best answers showed understanding of Chris's worries and fears about his parents and conveyed his idealism and also his impatience.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Julius Caesar*

- 4 This was a very popular question. Most understood Cassius's new worries and fears, and detected a change in his character or at least in the audience's perception of his character, from earlier in the play. The extract immediately follows the acrimonious parley at Philippi with Antony and Octavius. After their earlier quarrel over strategy, Brutus and Cassius are reconciled and resigned to their fates. Cassius is admitting to some superstition and there are references to birds of ill-omen which have replaced the eagles. There is a fatalism in his attitude to the coming battle, and a suggestion from both him and Brutus that they will not allow themselves to be taken as prisoners. Good answers considered the language in some detail and were sharply focused on 'sympathy'. Weaker answers tended to ignore the context and seemed unsure about what the relationship with Brutus actually was, although all recognised the farewell.
- 5 Good answers conveyed Antony's pragmatism, his keen intelligence and his passion with well-selected references from the play. Some weaker answers focused more on Brutus; some were distracted by the funeral speech at the expense of the rest of the text, and some wrote generally about Antony. Good answers ranged widely and in detail through the play.
- 6 Good answers covered Portia's anxiety for Brutus because he has been preoccupied and worried. She might be speculating on the reason for the secret visit of the conspirators – or has Brutus told her of the plot? She would be afraid for the future. They conveyed Portia's nobility and her admiration of that in her husband in an appropriate voice, and they also included some apt reference and occasional textual echoes. Detail was often lacking and this held back some answers. Weaker answers consisted of generalised emotion.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *The Tempest*

- 7 Although Ferdinand is on stage during the shipwreck scene, he does not speak then. These are his first words and express his bewilderment and grief. Ariel's song summarises what Ferdinand imagines to be his father's fate. Both Miranda and Ferdinand refer to the supernatural or spiritual in their comments about each other when they fall in love at first sight. Candidates sometimes commented on the dramatic irony of Ferdinand's mistaken assumption that he is *de facto* King of Naples. They also commented on Prospero's controlling role in orchestrating the scene, and on his asides to Ariel. The best answers discussed the magical and spiritual nature of the isle and its music. 'Dramatic' was covered less well than 'moving' although some saw the significance of the scene as a turning point. There was extensive quotation of the poetic language, though few analysed its rhythm and diction.
- 8 This was a 'classic' question, and quite popular, but not all that well answered. Most responses covered basic points but they were not developed or detailed. Possible points were that: Prospero has regained his usurped dukedom; the various plots against Prospero and Alonso have been exposed; Ariel has gained his freedom following his loyal service to Prospero. Most answers were straight 'yes'. Better answers commented on the treatment of Caliban and the fact that Antonio and Sebastian show no remorse. Only a very few commented on the idea of the 'rarer action is in virtue than in vengeance'. Very few commented on all the characters, variously omitting Stephano and Trinculo, Alonso and the nobles, even Caliban, or covering only a small part of his role. Quite a few were distracted by the Epilogue, perhaps interpreting 'by the end' as 'at the end'. Some interesting responses explored the idea of whether Prospero perceives that he has achieved justice and discussed the difference between justice and revenge.
- 9 All three characters are still under the influence of the drink they consumed earlier. They have all already been deceived by Ariel, and Trinculo has been beaten by Stephano, who thinks he is making comments which are actually Ariel's. They have completely fallen for the prospect of being involved in ruling the island which Caliban has put before them and Trinculo may well be anticipating the joys of wielding power. Although drunk, Trinculo may have some thoughts about Stephano and his assumption that he will be the dominant figure if their plans come to fruition. He will also be puzzled by the mysterious sound whose source he is trying to find. He may make some reference to Caliban's 'isle is full of noises' speech. He also might think back to the circumstances in which he first encountered Caliban. Although drunk, Trinculo seems to be rather pragmatic and fatalistic and good answers conveyed this. Some candidates found it difficult to capture his drunken voice, and there were certainly answers where the sophisticated diction used was far beyond him. Text references were frequently quite prolific, particularly about Caliban. There were a few exceptionally good answers, writing in the close vocabulary and style of the text, and sometimes following through to the garments and stinking pool.

OSCAR WILDE: *The Importance of Being Earnest*

- 10 It was good to see that all answers were very engaged with the text, and enjoyment very often communicated itself. Most candidates saw the humour in the fact that the proposal is being written down in a diary as it is delivered, Algernon is informed that he has already been engaged for three months without his knowledge, the engagement has been broken off once already and that this experienced man of the world is reduced to amazed near silence by this girl's confident poise. Better answers looked at hyperbole, absurdity, triviality and Wilde's witty, cynical view of accepted attitudes. Many found the humour hard to put into their own words. Several resorted to saying 'It is so funny!' which could be rewarded as personal response. Too many answers merely relied on stating that it was all Wilde's satire of Victorian society, without actually analysing how he did it.
- 11 Jack's life is a perpetual juggling act which gives an air of desperation to his actions. He does not know who he is. He is living two quite separate existences in London and in the country, which involve constant invention and the threat of disclosure. He is constantly worried about Cecily's existence being revealed and is in particular aware of his friend Algernon's interest in the details of his concealed life. The last thing he wants is for Algernon to meet Cecily. Most answers focused on two names and two lives. Knowledge of the whole play was not always demonstrated, even though it is quite a short text.

- 12 Gwendolen is of stout character and will not be downhearted. She is likely to be thinking how she has no intention of losing Ernest or of falling in with her mother's wishes. She will be plotting what to do next, perhaps thinking that a trip to the country is just what is needed. She is likely to be enjoying the excitement of it all. Many found the relationship with Lady Bracknell hard to explain in an authentic voice. Good answers captured her tone and vocabulary precisely and even created some aphorisms of their own.

Section B: Poetry

THOMAS HARDY: Selected Poems

- 13 There were some extremely impressive answers, which analysed meaning and symbolism in detail, including the etymology of 'titanic', and which understood the themes. Most picked up the sinister and dark tone to the poem, with the description of the great liner lying at the bottom of the sea. They saw the contrast between the opulence of the construction and fittings, and the gloom of the ocean resting place. Good answers also explored the idea that the collision was preordained and commented on the form of the poem, the listing of the stanzas and the rhythm and rhyme building to the final line. The focus of the question was on the words 'powerfully dramatic' and it was impossible to convey how Hardy makes the poem so without exploring the language in depth. Weak candidates, who did not know the poem and answered it as an unseen, scored poorly.
- 14 *The Pine Planters* is a projection of Marty South's unrequited feelings for Giles Winterborne in *The Woodlanders*. She feels unnoticed and knows that he is in love with another but there is no anger or jealousy, just acceptance and grief. The simplicity of the language and its conversational tone make it particularly moving and the rhyme scheme is similarly deceptive in its simplicity. There was a clear difference in quality of the answer between those who had been taught about Marty, and those who had not. Some candidates became side-tracked by 'hopeless love' into generalised statements about love. Most followed through the poem using quotations as a basis for their commentary; as the language is accessible here, this worked reasonably well for most.
- 15 Drummer Hodge is a poor and simple conscript fighting in the Boer War. He has been killed in a foreign land and his burial lacks all ceremony. The foreignness of his resting place and the imperviousness of any external powers are conveyed through the language and imagery. There were quite a lot of answers on this poem and some were very assured, responding sensitively to Hodge's fate and to the language and imagery. There was a great deal of engagement with the text. Even weaker answers showed understanding of meaning and major images such as a foreign land and stars. Textual detail was well utilised. What was good about all answers was the empathy and personal response – the best answers were superb in their understanding of Hodge's burial.

There were fewer answers on *No Buyers*, but they were also sympathetic to the old couple's situation, picking up on Hardy's feelings towards the poverty and hardship of the old couple and the sense of hopelessness and futility in the scene. In relation to either poem, the focus had to be on 'moving'.

SONGS OF OURSELVES: from Part 4

Responses to all three 'Songs' questions suffered from feature-spotting literary techniques, without explaining their effects.

- 16 This was probably the most popular question on the paper. Answers needed to focus on the 'disturbing' qualities of the poem. They might have commented on the sense of order and regularity in the first 16 lines and on the artificiality that is conveyed, while noting the use of the verb 'offends' and the simile 'like a rebuke'. The opposition of 'sanities' and 'hysteria' and 'madness' were worthy of comment as was the presentation of the City Planners in lines 29-38. There were answers from all abilities. Weaker answers did not grasp the satire and the implications. Many tried to unravel complex images, one at a time, rather than responding to the poem as a whole. There was a lot of mis-reading. There was, however, a good focus on 'disturbing', with candidates finding many points about which to be disturbed, even if they were not in the poem. Many weaker answers ignored the last two stanzas of the poem.
- 17 Answers needed to focus on 'memories of childhood': responses that explored the difference between the adult and childish perceptions of the horses scored very well. There was much which could be said, so answers were reasonably detailed, picking up on Muir's switch between past and

present, and a child's view of the animals – magical but terrifying and also awesome. Some imagery was a struggle, but on the whole responses were very positive and sometimes sensitive.

- 18 Candidates answered quite well on Hopkins and had a secure knowledge of the theme and language of this poem. 'Striking effects' were quite well covered, with understanding of imagery ranging from convincing to very literal. Most only covered the first part of the poem; there were various attempts to explain 'brinded' cows. Rossetti was quite well discussed too, especially the use of repetition. Some good answers compared the religious imagery in both poems, while others focused on natural imagery. There was no need to compare, but good answers did so naturally.

Section C: Prose

TSITSI DANGAREMBGA: *Nervous Conditions*

- 19 The context is the return of Babamukuru and his family from England, having been greeted by Jeremiah and Nhamo. Tambu is aggrieved at being excluded from the trip to the airport to greet her returning uncle and his family. There is on-going sibling rivalry between Tambu and her brother and Tambu is still sufficiently a child to want to beat her brother up, but is now sufficiently mature to realise that this is no longer an option. She has a growing realisation of the limitations imposed on women by the culture in which she lives. This was the most popular question on this text but most answers only discussed Tambu's thoughts on not visiting the airport. There were a few good answers which explored her feelings about all the other characters in the scene, and related her anger to cultural differences. There were very few references to the writing except to the use of rhetorical questions.
- 20 Both characters are in some ways rebelling against the culture(s) in which they find themselves, both could be seen as headstrong and both are ambitious, particularly academically. Both question assumptions about their pre-ordained roles as girls/women. Candidates often saw similarities in their conflicts with their parents and between Nyasha's argument with her father after the dance and Tambu's refusal to attend her parents' wedding. The words 'vividly convey' were given very little attention on the whole. Some strong responses explored the similarities between the two girls at some length, in particular their academic ambitions and how far they were prepared to go to in order to achieve them, the sense of displacement both felt at being away from the homestead or from England, and their attitudes to the pre-ordained gender roles that were being thrust on them.
- 21 Jeremiah, of course, has not mended the thatch. Tambu and her aunt have. Nonetheless, Jeremiah would be likely to regard the praise as his due and would be pleased to receive some positive recognition from his older brother. As Babamukuru has come to take Tambu back to the mission, Jeremiah might be relieved that there is one less mouth to feed, hostile to the idea that his daughter is being given ideas above her station, and self-congratulatory that the best is being done for his family. Good answers would have captured a convincing voice of a lazy, feckless individual who assumes that everything is due to him because he is a man but there were not many good answers and knowledge of the text was limited. One very strong response captured very convincingly Jeremiah's sense of satisfaction at the way in which the rewards for his daughter's hard work were accruing to him and looked forward with relish to more of the same in future because that was his entitlement.

ANITA DESAI: *Fasting, Feasting*

- 22 Mama has told Uma that there is no point in her continuing at school since she is neither academic nor sporting, and her parents are trying to arrange a marriage for her. She loves school, and she is distraught and looking to the nuns for support. Mother Agnes disappoints because of her lack of understanding and her sexism. Most candidates understood these points and also picked up Uma's mother's response at home. Successful answers commented on the violence of Uma's emotions and responded to the pathos of the situation. Some explored the language in depth. A number of responses engaged very sympathetically with Uma, expressing very strong disapproval of Mamapapa and Mother Agnes.
- 23 There were very few answers to this question and the choice of amusing moments was ill-judged.
- 24 Some candidates found it hard to find Mrs Patton's style of speaking, so they used textual detail instead to identify attitudes and character and this worked quite well. Some created a very convincing voice and conveyed their sympathy for the character through it. They conveyed her

interest in Arun and his ‘foreignness’, wrote about their shopping and cooking together, and her determination to be vegetarian. They often reflected on her family particularly Melanie about whom they tended to attribute a sense of failure. Some candidates captured Mrs Patton’s well-meaning earnestness very successfully.

KIRAN DESAI: *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*

- 25 Most answers were on the extract. Candidates found ‘ridiculous’ easier than ‘magical’; for the latter they used the sensuous description at the start – with the best answers re-creating the sensuality in their own descriptions. This contrasted with the sublime to the ridiculous that followed, everyone singing along with Miss Jyotsna, followed again by detailed comments on the spy. There were excellent paragraphs on the spy’s activities, and language points on the mouse-hole, involving irony and satire. It was so pleasing to see that candidates could analyse their own responses to the humour.
- 26 There were some answers, all quite good in commenting on Sampath’s character, though less strong on detail from the text as a whole. All candidates found him likeable because of his humorous streak, his imaginativeness, his alternative view of the world. Better answers commented on the fact that he is capable of making foolish those who deserve to be made so, of whom there are many in the novel and they also wrote about spiritualism and the lack of it, and Sampath’s close relationship with the monkey companions. Differentiation came from engagement with Desai’s writing, and the ways in which it makes Sampath so engaging.
- 27 Pinky would be incandescently angry as she often is with her brother, thinking that not even he has managed to bring the family name into such disrepute before. She would also be thinking about what this does to her marriage prospects and hoping that her brother leaves home for good before she does him some violence. Though it was not easy for some to find an authentic voice, the emotions were generally accurate and the best answers conveyed Pinky’s characteristic tone.

GEORGE ELIOT: *Silas Marner*

- 28 This was a very popular text, and very popular question. There were some very good answers indeed, exploring Silas’s ‘transformation’, the spiritual connotations, and the role of Eppie. Some reference to the context – the collapse of Molly in the snow and Eppie finding her way to Marner’s cottage was useful. All understood the gold references, the links back to Lantern Yard, Silas’s new paternal feelings, and his being received back into the community. Candidates showed real sympathy and empathy for someone who is a fictional character and responded freely to what is moving about the extract. Good answers explored the writing in detail, commenting on the contrasts and significances and on the symbolism and imagery. It was widely recognised to be a turning point in Silas’s life. The best answers used the full range of the passage. Weaker answers had narrower range but still directed and analysed the material. The weakest answers did not direct the material carefully enough and did not explore why the passage was so moving. Equally evident, but appropriately used in some responses, was sound general knowledge of the novel and links were carefully and successfully made.
- 29 The distinction between ‘not good’ and ‘scoundrel’ was key to a good answer. Answers commented on Godfrey’s weakness in standing up to his brother and father, his behaviour towards Molly and Eppie and balanced this by considering his positive qualities as a husband. Most sympathised with him, blaming his brother, and seeing Nancy’s inability to have children as punishment. This was well answered in terms of understanding, even if the less able did not have command of the textual details.
- 30 All recognised Dolly’s authentic voice, and were able to cite plenty of textual detail about her visit. The best captured life in the village, and what it meant to be a member of it. They included stories that Dolly has heard of Marner through her husband’s conversations in the pub. Although not widely popular, those who did attempt the question often achieved very convincing voices, capturing the essential benevolence of the character in a convincing vernacular.

SUSAN HILL: *I'm the King of the Castle*

- 31 Kingshay is totally weighed down. The opening description of the countryside is oppressive. Even in daylight he needs to bolster his courage by defying the gargoyles. In the church he feels the deadness of it all and of God's disapproving presence. He feels an overpowering sense of guilt and is unable to hide either his real wishes or his fear of Hooper. The question was answered by many, of all abilities, and there was much material for candidates to find. The weakest did not cover the whole extract, or focused only on outside and inside the church. All could understand Kingshay's state of mind, though quite a few omitted the context, i.e. his desire that Hooper would die from the fall at the castle. The best identified with Kingshay's emotional agony, isolation, and guilt, exploring in detail how his thoughts developed during the extract, and his utter despair at the end. There was pleasing focus on language in the best answers.
- 32 Again, a popular and well answered question. Answers differed in the material they cited, from a description of the house, the rooms in it, and the garden, to the influence of Mrs Kingshay and Hooper's father and grandfather. All understood that Warings was Hooper's territory and the source of his power. They saw that it is without any life or homeliness or beauty.
- 33 Hooper's voice needed to be in the tone of the answer, as well as the obvious text references. The best answers articulated his chilling, calculating tone in short emphatic sentences and conveyed his belief that he has all the advantages over Kingshay, who is a mummy's boy and a wimp and that he will have little difficulty in making Kingshay's life a misery, and possibly in getting rid of him for good.

from *Stories of Ourselves*

- 34 This question was popular and there were some insightful answers, but most did not make best use of the extract. Few explored Lucy's role, and most just concentrated on a failing marriage and feelings of cultural isolation, often explained in an assertive manner. The best answers considered the symbolism of the mirage and explored the flight incident in detail.
- 35 Very many candidates wrote at length about the whole of *Her First Ball* while omitting the actual end. Some seemed to think that the fat man's depressing comments where what Leila takes away with her and missed the fact that as soon as she begins dancing again she forgets about him and fails to recognise him. There was some understanding of the humour in *At Hiruhamara*, especially the 'throw nothing away' theme and the annual dinner, but answers were often narrative.
- 36 Some found it difficult to find a voice, even as they referred to the goats and the wife, the shopkeeper and the American. The best answers used irony and humour well to capture the character, to whom all responded very positively. The major problem was lack of detail of the moment – there was much general comment about being rich and spending the 100 rupees. Only the best answers conveyed something of the misunderstanding which is the basis of the conversation.

LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

Paper 0486/42
Paper 42 (Closed Books)

Key Messages

1. *In poetry questions meaning, significance and personal response need to be explored first, then how the writer uses language for effect to create that meaning.*
2. *Language needs to be discussed in prose extracts.*
3. *The discussion of punctuation, form and of stage directions in drama contributes nothing without reference to meaning.*
4. *There needs to be far more focus on the key words in a question. Words such as ‘explore’, ‘explore the ways’, ‘how’, ‘how far,’ ‘vividly’, ‘memorably’, ‘powerful’, ‘dramatic’, ‘moving’.*
5. *Quotations need to support points, not to be merely added. They should be relatively brief, pertinent and integrated into the argument.*

General Comments

Prose questions were generally well answered, detailed and appreciative of themes and characters, with much personal engagement with the texts. Drama answers were, perhaps inevitably, mostly from a reader's perspective rather than an audience's, with candidates responding to the text on page rather than on the stage. There were some very good empathic answers with much textual evidence; weaker answers kept repeating the emotions of the character or retold the plot with little sense of the character's voice / viewpoint. Generally candidates did not include enough textual echo or reference to relevant details during their thoughts on the relevant moment. Sometimes the moment itself was not tightly enough focused upon. At times the character (such as Sampath in **Question 27**) was limited to repeating the same thing several times in the monologue.

Essay structure improves year on year. There are very few essays now which lack introductions and conclusions, linked paragraphs, and points supported by textual evidence; though there are still examples of formulaic introductions which contribute very little. For example, where candidates' essay structure was less effective, this was often because they were inclined to provide lengthy introductions; detailed paraphrase; unnecessary biographical accompaniment; and broad discussion of related social issues arising from text. These features were especially apparent with 'Julius Caesar', 'The Importance of Being Earnest', and the short story 'The Rain Horse'. Many candidates referred closely and regularly to the question, though some relied much too heavily on general and sometimes arguable assertions. As often, concise answers with precise points supported by relevant quotation tended to score more highly than longer rambling essays which often lost sight of the question.

Plenty of candidates showed good knowledge and understanding of their texts, but a fair number of these candidates nonetheless produced limited responses because they overlooked the need to focus on an author's methods and techniques; the 'How' or 'In what ways' of the question.

The use of quotations could be improved in the work of some candidates. There was often a lack of connection between the point and the quotation as if the candidate had merely put it in because s/he remembered it, not because it supported the point being made. In the best answers, quotations were brief and integrated seamlessly into the argument.

We have argued for so long that candidates need to discuss language that now it has almost gone too far, with some essays being about nothing else. In responses to poetry some candidates have written pages and pages of line-by-line paraphrase, or line-by-line identification of literary terms with no discussion of the meaning of the poem at all. All the sophisticated and complex language terms in the world do not compensate for lack of understanding. For example there were responses to the drama extract questions structured so that there were separate paragraphs on dialogue, diction, stage directions and punctuation, which ultimately failed to convey any understanding of what was actually happening on the stage.

Candidates who began their answers to **Question 1** with “Miller makes the ending dramatic by his use of diction, stage directions, imagery and juxtaposition” were unlikely to be doing themselves many favours. Similarly, the trend to write about punctuation on its own has grown, and is particularly unhelpful in commenting on passages from Shakespeare.

There were very few unfinished papers and very few rubric infringements.

Comments on Specific Questions

Section A: DRAMA

ARTHUR MILLER: *All My Sons*

Question 1

This was a popular question and it was generally very well done in thematic terms. Candidates invariably recognised the power of Chris’s disillusionment as he rages against his father, and the impact of the letter in general. However, few commented upon the effect that the revelation has upon us as we now have to reassess the events of the play so far and readjust our feelings towards Joe. Also, in thematic terms, comments upon The American Dream generally rang hollow with candidates showing little confidence in linking the ending to it in symbolic terms.

A weakness generally was the lack of awareness about the dramatic impact of events. It was highly commendable that many recognised the importance of stage directions in Miller’s plays and mentioned ‘... inaudibly’ when Joe says he has to go to turn himself in. However, the full significance was not appreciated in general. The effect of his mumbled words is to convince us and the other characters that he is a broken man, who will now meekly go along with what Chris plans. It does not occur to us that, in his present state, he has formulated an alternative plan i.e. suicide. When the gunshot is heard, the effect is stunning.

Question 2

Comparatively few candidates attempted this question. There was recognition of the sheltered nature of the house, hiding behind the poplar trees as if in shame. Its location on the outskirts of town was also taken up by many in this respect – a desire for anonymity. The symbolism of Larry’s tree was also recognised by nearly all but here **was** an opportunity to develop ideas about the American Dream that was not taken up by many. Though some highlighted the stage directions which called for a comfortable, quite prosperous looking house, the dramatic impact of illusion over reality was not sufficiently developed. When we first meet Joe on a Sunday morning in his back yard reading his newspaper, he is the picture of the American success story. He is a family man enjoying his day of rest after no doubt working hard throughout the previous week. It is a picture of contentment and serenity. This is our opening impression and, as such, it is a powerful one – hence our shock as the revelations are made later on in the play.

Question 3

Kate will clearly be appalled and terrified by the prospect of Ann’s coming back, and will be asking herself why she is doing so. She might well guess what the object of the trip is and will possibly see this as undermining all her attempts to shield the family from the consequences of Joe’s actions. On the whole this question was not very well done. Too many candidates took a narrow and even superficial view of the moment. It is rare to actually be wrong in an empathetic response, but here some candidates did not recognise Kate’s anxiety about the return of Ann. Whilst she comforts herself with the thought that Ann has kept herself loyal to Larry, there are more ominous fears also.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Julius Caesar*

Question 4

This was a popular question and most candidates were able to make some relevant comment. There was much to comment on here: the secretiveness of the discussion between Brutus and Casca; the popularity of Caesar and his growing power, and the play-acting over the offering of the crown; the excitableness of the ‘common herd’; and the news of the execution of Marullus and Flavius for going against Caesar. Good answers understood and commented on the cynicism of Casca, and the fact that his thoughts are expressed in prose rather than verse. They considered the context of this scene in relation to the conspiracy. Weaker

responses chose an ‘overview’ approach rather than exploring the passage in detail and relating it to the ‘atmosphere in Rome’. Significantly, in this respect, many responses omitted to mention the presence of Cassius and Brutus at all. Quite a lot of candidates failed to mention the fact that the version of events we are given is narrated by Casca – hardly an unbiased account.

Question 5

This was a popular question. Good answers went beyond the character sketch, and presented knowledge of the two women in an argument that demonstrated an understanding of their dramatic significance. Both are well-born noble women, married to powerful men. Portia seems to be treated as more of an equal to Brutus than Calphurnia is to Caesar. Both reveal dramatically aspects of their husband’s characters – e.g. Calphurnia’s dreams expose Caesar’s belief in superstition, as well as his vanity and then his susceptibility to being flattered. Portia’s death occurs at the worst possible moment for Brutus and Cassius, but is to some extent responsible for their reconciliation. Weaker answers showed a basic knowledge of the two women, but were far less successful in exploring ‘how’ Shakespeare made them both ‘so significant’.

Question 6

Lots of candidates showed excellent knowledge of the play in general here. Many candidates recognised Brutus’ tendency towards introspection and they were able to capture this whilst conveying his resignation, fatalism and possible regrets. A weakness of many, however, was to concentrate entirely on the ghost and its reasons for appearing and not mentioning Portia’s suicide – particularly the harrowing nature of it which must haunt Brutus as much as the ghost of Caesar, or his feelings towards Cassius and their earlier argument.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *The Tempest*

Question 7

This was a popular question but it did elicit mixed responses. Prospero is dissembling here, to the bewilderment of Miranda but unfortunately also to the bewilderment of a number of candidates. Some answers were rendered ineffectual by their inability to convey the fact that his anger is feigned. His behaviour as a stern but loving father to Miranda is credible, but his aside to the audience helps to explain the reason for his behaviour. Similarly, the use of magic in staying Ferdinand’s sword, whilst mentioned, was not fully explained in dramatic terms. The sheer power of this demonstration of Prospero’s art is the first time we see it for ourselves and it is very impressive, visually and verbally. What needed to be stressed overall is the authority of Prospero at this moment – over Ferdinand, Miranda and Ariel. Good responses recognised the recurrence of the theme of usurpation and how this relates to the play as a whole; they also paid close attention to the language of the extract, commenting for example on the intensive use of imperatives. Where candidates commented on the behaviour of the other characters, they needed to make it relevant to the question.

Question 8

This was well done on the whole. Most were able to refer to moments such as Prospero’s account of earlier events when speaking to Miranda; their treatment of Gonzalo when he is trying to console Alonso; Sebastian’s insensitive reproaches to Alonso; the thwarted plot against Alonso; and their attempts to cover their behaviour when Gonzalo wakes up to foil their plans and the lack of any sign of remorse. Good answers were able to reflect on their sustained cynicism throughout the play and consider the language they used. Most recognised that there are differences in character between Sebastian and Antonio, despite the fact that they always appear together on stage. Equally, the fact that Prospero’s brother never repents of his sins is important to note as it adds an interesting ‘realistic’ twist to the theme of forgiveness. Shakespeare seems to recognise that some people are simply beyond the pale – Antonio’s assurance of good behaviour in future is only obtained by Prospero’s threat to disclose his attempted treachery to Alonso were he to sin again. Whereas good responses focused on both ‘memorable’ and ‘villains’, weaker responses described their villainy in quite general, narrative terms.

Question 9

Of those who chose this question, most were able to convey a sense of Stephano's ribald / drunken nature quite well, although some candidates were less effective in this respect. There was generally a relatively good understanding of his motivation to become king and make Miranda his queen. The best responses showed close awareness of text and character, for example having him sing a snatch or two from his song when he first enters the play, and were able to capture his voice with a sense of inflated and intoxicated self-esteem and entitlement; but many indulged in wild speculation involving drink, the creation of magnificent palaces and even invading Naples.

OSCAR WILDE: *The Importance of Being Earnest*

Question 10

This was a very popular choice, but it was not always well done. The obvious point of the triviality of the obsession with muffins at this time of supposed distress for the two men was made, but attempts to link this with satire on the aristocracy were not often helpful. There is undoubtedly some truth in this idea but only in the most general sense – assertions about the Victorian obsession with food (particularly as a substitute for sexual gratification) were not usually convincing. The vast majority of the candidates were able to comment on the content in terms of *what* makes the passage an amusing end to Act Two (the obsession with food and the christening), but far fewer candidates actually engaged with the language and explored *how* Wilde makes it amusing.

Question 11

This also proved a very popular choice. Better candidates recognised the humour in a character who makes such strong assertions which, upon closer examination, turn out to be completely nonsensical. One weakness was the choice of so many to overlook her disagreement and reconciliation with Gwendolen, which has so much to say about feigned politeness in respectable circles. Candidates should be aware of the danger of making Cecily representative of Victorian women in general. To call all aristocratic women 'empty headed' is rather sweeping – Wilde has to be given some credit for creating a delightfully eccentric character in her own right. Stronger candidates were able to draw on some of the following: she is not the demure, innocent young girl she is supposed to be; she has a strong will of her own and detests the studies laid down by her guardian and Miss Prism; and she is intent on capturing the first eligible man she can find. However, too many candidates simply narrated character sketches and needed to consider Wilde's methods in greater detail.

Question 12

This was the least popular question on the text. The best answers showed clear understanding and awareness of character and plot. Some took Miss Prism into the room and gave a summary of the final scene from her point of view; however, few managed to sustain a really convincing voice, instead relying on quotation cohabiting uneasily with modern vernacular such as 'I really fancy Dr Chasuble'. However knowledge of narrative details was evident and most responses began to assume a voice.

Section B: POETRY

THOMAS HARDY: *Selected Poems*

Question 13

Of the questions on Hardy, this and **Question 15** were the most popular. Generally, candidates wrote with good understanding of these poems; what distinguished better responses were those candidates who were able to comment with precision on the effects of particular words / images / poetic devices. Most candidates demonstrated good contextual knowledge as far as Hardy's background is concerned. The same point can be made for all three questions: candidates might be advised to see the poem in terms of definite movements or phases to help them organise responses in a coherent manner, rather than simply work through each stanza.

The key words in **Question 13** were 'how' and 'moving portrayal of despair'. Good responses engaged with Hardy's use of language, such as his use of contrasting imagery – the allusions to nature and to death, the broken rhythm and rhyme, and were able to show how this conveyed his feelings. The initial shock and sadness of her death is followed by an inability to believe that his wife has gone. This leads on to memories

of happier times before returning to the stark realisation that he must now face life alone. Weaker responses tended to work through the poem, paraphrasing the quotations (thus showing some level of understanding of ideas) but comments lacked the necessary focus on the question.

Question 14

Not many responses were seen to this question. Good answers focused on ‘feelings’ about the passage of time, rather than just describing how time passes by. *In Time of the Breaking of Nations* reflects on timelessness in a way; some situations go on in the same way from one generation to another; the allusion to war suggests that despite the chaos it creates, time will heal. Some candidates knew the context of the poem and the significance of its title. Stronger responses showed understanding of the poem’s ideas that even though war might kill the individuals, the rural way of life goes on, love endures.

Question 15

Of those candidates who chose this question, most wrote on *I Look into My Glass*. There were a few candidates who clearly misunderstood the term ‘glass’ thinking it was a drinking glass, but most candidates were able to make some relevant comment about Hardy’s ‘feelings about growing old’. It is a short poem, and those candidates who were able to focus clearly and in detail on the effects on particular words and phrases fared better than those who relied on paraphrase. Good answers were able to comment on Hardy’s use of language: for example the double meaning of ‘wasting’; the accumulative effect of the negatives of ‘undistrest’, ‘cold’ and ‘lonely’; the assonance and internal rhyme of the final stanza that links words such as ‘make me grieve ...shakes this...frame’ together; while showing just how this conveyed his grief, sadness, loneliness and despair. Less successful answers still managed to show some general understanding, but frequently failed to comment on *how* Hardy felt about his ageing.

SONGS OF OURSELVES: *from Part 4*

Question 16

This was probably the most popular poetry question, and it inspired many different theories about the source of the narrator’s happiness! Perhaps the best answers were those that recognised that the poem works on several levels. Most candidates were able to identify the celebratory nature of this poem, and how the imagery employed by Rossetti supported that feeling. The candidates who backed up their assertion that her happiness is rooted in spiritual re-birth did so by pointing out the pattern of images with religious connotations. Some candidates showed rather limited understanding of imagery such as ‘halcyon sea’, generally coupling it with ‘rainbow shell’ as biblical imagery. Many however were well-prepared in this respect. Regardless of the specific source of her happiness, it was important to define it in some way. Consideration of individual images out of the poem’s overall context cannot really be appreciated in terms of effectiveness, relevance or appropriateness unless we know this.

Question 17

This was also a popular question and candidates had clearly been taught a variety of interpretations, some more convincing than others. Nevertheless, most were able to show a reasonable knowledge and understanding of the poem and the idea that fear does not negate admiration. Successful responses paid some attention to points such as the description of the snake in the second stanza, and the impact of the metaphorical language; were able to comment on the contrasts between warm and cold. Less successful candidates tended to provide a broad discussion about man and nature, some focusing entirely on the poem as an allegory of the racial tension between the Aborigine and the white man, while exhibiting an uncertain grasp of some poetic devices used - especially personification and metaphor.

Question 18

Very few candidates attempted this question, and most with limited success. There were a few candidates who answered on *The Horses* by Muir, a different poem that is not in the anthology. The question asked candidates ‘how’ the poets communicated a ‘vivid sense of the past’. Most candidates showed some knowledge and understanding of each poem, but few managed to relate this to the task. In *Horses*, candidates might have considered the interplay of verb tenses within the poem, and the references to childhood whilst exploring the imagery of the poem. In *The Planners*, candidates needed to select the material carefully: too many concentrated on the present day and showed understanding of Cheng’s criticisms of the planner’s destruction of the past and history, but closer attention to how this communicated a

vivid sense of the past was needed - for example the contrast between imagery related to the present and what it implies about the past.

Section C: Prose

TSITSI DANGAREMBGA: *Nervous Conditions*

Question 19

The context is that Babamukuru has returned to the homestead with the news of Nhamo's death. The sadness of the actual event is confirmed by the reactions of the parents and his other siblings. There was much to be said on the mother's reaction in particular, both to this news and the later revelation that Tambu is to take his place at the mission, and on Tambu's rather more muted and nuanced reaction to news of her brother's death, as well as her sense of triumph at the end of the passage. This was the most popular of the three questions on *Nervous Conditions*. The key phrases in the question were 'how' and 'so sad and yet so hopeful'. Quite a few candidates' responses were very imbalanced, or only dealt with either 'sad' or 'hopeful'. Many were keen to go beyond the extract and discuss the significance of the opportunity being offered to Tambu in the thematic context of the novel, without really exploring the grief that is so palpable at the funeral first. In particular, the ability of the narrator to create such a visual picture was recognised and commented on by comparatively few candidates. Most responses focused on the content and meaning of the passage, rather than explore how Dangarembga's writing makes the moment both sad and hopeful.

Question 20

Candidates were asked which male character they found 'most admirable'. Babamukuru was the more popular choice, but some saw Mr Matimba as admirable, as his help for Tambu is not affected by family ties or responsibilities. On the surface, Matimba was the more straightforward option, as he makes few appearances and there is no ambiguity about his essential goodness. However, more scope was available for candidates who opted for Babamukuru: the most able candidates were not only well aware of the negative aspects of his character, but also recognised that even he is torn between his cultural heritage and the westernisation of his family. A few made the case for Chido for his attempts to mediate between Nyasha and her father, and his concern for his mother's well-being. It could have been argued that none of the male characters in the novel is presented as admirable, but very few candidates took this view.

Question 21

Relatively few answers were seen to this question. Candidates were asked to write the thoughts of Tambu's mother after Babamukuru has just driven her back to her home after the birth of her son Dambudzo. She will certainly be pre-occupied with the baby, particularly as he is her only surviving male child and may well recall what happened to Nhamo. It is possible she will be thinking about her sister Lucia and the job Babamukuru has found for her, for which she expresses her gratitude. She may be contemplating her own forthcoming wedding, which Babamukuru has arranged for her. She could well express mixed feelings about Babamukuru and his wife, and she may be regretting leaving baby-clothes behind her in her excitement. Responses were often very generalised and narrative; although most showed some general knowledge and understanding of some of the events, very few managed to capture her excitable and emotionally volatile voice.

ANITA DESAI: *Fasting, Feasting*

Question 22

The context is that Arun has just arrived at the Patton house following an unsuccessful stay in a room near the university, and with the help of an introduction from Mrs O'Henry. Mrs Patton shows a fascination for his different culture, especially the food, seizing the opportunity to 'mother' him and to make him feel at home. Her interest is focused on food, and her realisation that he is vegetarian is dramatic to the extent that she wants to join in. Arun is uncomfortable, even oppressed by her interest. The question asked candidates what Desai's writing made them feel about Mrs Patton at this moment. There was a tendency here for candidates to provide extensive narrative accounts and not address the question in detail. However, good candidates attempted to create an argument grounded in the text and often provided a balanced viewpoint. It was, however, clear that many candidates had not worked out their feelings about Mrs Patton beforehand. The complexity of her character was appreciated by relatively few; many applauded her friendliness towards Arun (and her kindness) without making any connection between this and the dysfunctional relationship she has with her own family. In many ways, she lives in her own head just as much as Arun does. We do not

know what she feels about any aspect of her own life, except that she does not want her sister to have a bad impression of her. If she allowed herself to dwell upon her life, we imagine she might be desperately unhappy.

Question 23

This was a very popular question, and candidates clearly felt very strongly about MamaPapa and their success as parents. There was much that could be, and was, said. For example, their intentions are honourable, but some of their children get more attention than others. Arun, being the only boy, gets all of the attention but he also gets all of the pressure. Uma is used pretty much as a skivvy; they see no point in continuing her education. They go to great lengths to arrange marriages for the daughters, but do not show much discrimination in selecting husbands; although Papa does rescue Uma from her unhappy marriage. Candidates engaged enthusiastically with this question and a surprising number were totally supportive of MamaPapa, believing that, despite their shortcomings as parents in some respects, they only had their children's best interests at heart. The best answers were able to offer a more subtle verdict on this – that, beneath the facade of looking out for their children, they were perhaps really only protecting their own best interests. Also to be commended were those responses that took the balanced view of suggesting that the decisions taken by MamaPapa in the course of the novel were totally in line with their cultural conventions and beliefs.

Question 24

The relationship between Uma and Aruna has always been slightly awkward, in that Aruna has shone in every respect beside Uma. In previous visits she has tended to dump the children on Uma and go off visiting her friends. Dinesh is a rather sinister child, as shown by the shooting of the pigeon, his blame of Uma, and the mysterious activities with Panna. Good answers showed empathy for Uma, and captured her feelings which would probably be mostly those of relief. Weaker answers merged all the visits of Aruna and her family into one and became rather too narrative, giving Uma a voice that was too outspoken and confidently articulate.

KIRAN DESAI: *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*

Question 25

Candidates were asked to show how Desai made the experts consulted by the family so ridiculous. There was much to comment on: the energetic good sport Dr. Banerjee with his conventional medicine, who in the end can only declare Sampath crazy; the Tibetan who thinks that sea mice and other non-existent animals might do the trick; the nature doctor who prescribes starvation as a cure; and finally the holy man, who ironically is perhaps the most sensible in his down to earth comments and advice. This was a popular choice and the overwhelming majority of candidates were able to produce reasonable responses, but few were able to go beyond this. As ever, the way to gain higher marks lay in the willingness to explore language in detail. Few highlighted the exchanges between Mr Chawla and the holy man, and how comic effect is gained from the rapid-fire questions which become increasingly bizarre in nature and the largely monosyllabic responses: no comment is given about how the questions were asked, it is left to the reader to imagine this ridiculous but deadly serious conversation. What unites all the 'experts' is their absolute confidence in their own wisdom. Stronger answers were able to identify Desai's use of caricature and satire: weaker answers retold the extract.

Question 26

Desai presents Mr Chawla as endlessly self-important, directing his family like a policeman. He is full of bustling, often mindless, energy but without an ounce of imagination. He is greedy enough to reverse his view of Sampath once he has recognised his son's potential as a cash cow. Candidates who chose this question were able to show a range of knowledge of his character, but responses were often lacking in the necessary focus on how Desai ridicules him through her descriptions of his behaviour. The best engaged with her writing and satire, but most retold what he did without drawing any relevant conclusions.

Question 27

This was a popular question, and most candidates who chose to answer on it did quite well. Sampath would clearly be feeling horror at the idea of being married to anyone as far from his dream of a woman as his father's choice. He would be shuddering at the memories of her ice cold touch, and her scrawny form pointing out the chasm between her and the dream of his ideal woman. No doubt he would be ever more

certain that he must stay where he is. Stronger candidates engaged well with this task, capturing Sampath's voice, which ranged from panic to a state of ecstatic dreaminess. Those who were less successful with his voice nonetheless showed relevant knowledge of the context, and conveyed his revulsion at his father's choice.

GEORGE ELIOT: *Silas Marner*

Question 28

The focus of the question was on how Eliot vividly reveals the relationship between Squire Cass and his sons in the passage. There is evidence of the irascibility of the Squire, the excessiveness of his reactions, and the way in which the sons conspire to avoid their father's anger. We see Godfrey's feeble attempts to placate him – and his failure to achieve anything, as well as the Squire's lack of faith in him. There is dissatisfaction expressed towards both sons. Good answers were able to comment on this and see implications such an uncaring and inconsistent father, and two sons (perhaps even four) who have turned out badly as a result; they were also able to comment on the way in which Eliot makes the dialogue so revealing. Some mistakenly saw the Cass family as aristocracy, and asserted that Eliot was making a political point about the ineffectiveness of the ruling class.

Question 29

A pity more did not attempt this question, as most candidates who chose it did reasonably well. Dolly is a delightfully positive character who has significance in the overall context of the novel in terms of the rehabilitation of Silas Marner. Her unfailing kindness was recognised and illustrated by all candidates who responded warmly to it. Candidates were generally able to cite instances of Dolly's helpfulness to Silas Marner, and others could additionally discuss her significance in the novel. The best answers focused on showing how Eliot's writing makes Dolly 'so memorable' to them, for example through direct description and authorial comment, and instances of Dolly's religious fervour and her behaviour, which reflect her Christian principles. Some responses showed knowledge, but were restricted to a general character study with no personal response to her character or reasons why she is 'so memorable'.

Question 30

Nancy is a good and pragmatic character. She has just learnt from Godfrey of his parentage of Eppie. No doubt she will be thinking of own childlessness, and Godfrey's earlier suggestion of adoption. It is possible this will affect how she feels towards Godfrey at this moment. However, her thoughts about the way forward will no doubt be influenced by what she knows of Silas and his relationship with Eppie. The best answers showed understanding and knowledge of its context, but not many managed to capture the sheer horror Nancy must have felt upon her husband's confession of his earlier transgressions. It must have been a real struggle for her to reconcile herself to this. Having done so, however, the prospect of adopting Eppie must have seemed like a God-sent opportunity to her but, again, candidates did not always convey this excitement. There were some extremely creative expressions of emotion which really bore little relationship to either the events of the novel or Nancy's character.

SUSAN HILL: *I'm the King of the Castle*

Question 31

At first, this moment appears to be a decisive turning point. For the first time Hooper cringes in the face of Kingshaw's violence, instead of the other way round. Kingshaw feels totally superior even when he gives the immediate advantage away. It is possible that the reader feels Kingshaw to be terribly mistaken. The best answers were those that recognised that, by clinging to his sense of morality and goodness (despite his initial outburst), Kingshaw is doomed to lose the battle in the long run, as Hooper is constricted by no such concepts. They also engaged with Hill's writing, making the point for example that the dramatic quality of the short sentence 'But Kingshaw could feel him, listening' towards the end of the passage creates a terrifying, almost tangible sense of fear for the future.

Question 32

This was a question that was well answered on the whole. Better responses were those that looked for the fine detail when describing incidences of Hooper's cruelty. Closer examination of fewer of his actions was more effective than a simple overview of his wickedness. What is truly terrifying about him is the sense of omniscience in Kingshaw's mind, and this was recognised by many. The majority of candidates were able to

cite relevant instances of Hooper's behaviour and treatment of Kingshaw. The strongest responses showed awareness of Hill's methods, and engaged with language effects. There was also some understanding of Hooper's psychological abnormality illustrated by most by his reaction to his grandfather's death and to Hooper's suicide. The key phrase was 'such a terrifying figure', and those who focused their response on this did best.

Question 33

Not many candidates chose this question. Fielding's voice would be quite matter of fact. He might be considering whether it is worthwhile remaining friends with Kingshaw if that is to be his attitude. He no doubt would be thinking about the relationship between Hooper and Kingshaw, and life at Warings. He might also be thinking about Kingshaw's behaviour: why did he refuse to come home with him and Hooper, and why did Kingshaw seem so angry and upset? Better responses showed an understanding of this and knowledge of the context; there were, however, quite a few candidates who clearly found it hard to decide what he would be thinking about his new acquaintances, and instead wrote entirely creative responses describing daily life of the farm with no reference to what had just happened.

from *Stories of Ourselves*

Question 34

This story appears to have been greatly enjoyed by candidates, although some viewed the father particularly harshly. He was often seen to care about nothing but money, and some went as far as to say that the boy hated him. The text itself suggests nothing more than a retrospective irony, with some gentle mockery. The best answers were those that were able to stand back from the content of the story, and recognise that this story is not told by a 13 year old boy but by an adult looking back to the time when he was at that age. Thus the humour is refined and filtered through an adult's eyes. The 'how', 'vivid' and 'amusing' was explored quite effectively by stronger candidates, but there was a tendency with weaker responses to simply assert that a point was 'amusing' and retell the extract without making any comment on Lurie's writing.

Question 35

This was a popular choice with candidates, but many struggled to focus clearly enough on just what makes the story so shocking, relying instead on a narrative summary of the entire story. There was much that could be commented on such as the deliberate targeting of the man by the horse; the potential violence throughout; and the nightmarish quality of the writing. The best did do this, engaging sensitively with Hughes' writing, recognising the 'man versus nature' symbolism at the heart of the text. Most candidates were able to respond at some level, commenting on the strangeness and terrifying portrayal of the horse. Stronger candidates considered the man's expectations in returning; the part played by descriptions of the weather and landscape; even going on to consider different possible perspectives of the narrative. The best focused on 'so shocking', whereas some focused instead on the psychology of the protagonist or the significance of the horse, without much or any reference to the question.

Question 36

Candidates had the opportunity to capture Lord Emsworth's style of speech, that of an aristocratic buffoon; they also engaged with the humour of the situation. There were many highly entertaining responses. One answer even had Lord Emsworth prevaricate on whether Donaldson's produced dog biscuits or cat biscuits. Whilst some candidates found it hard to sustain a developed response and the voice - wrongly supposing that Lord Emsworth might use such Americanisms as 'gotten' - most candidates were able to capture something of Lord Emsworth's self-centred view of the world; his obsessive concern for the pumpkin; and his basic stupidity. What is most clear is that the story is clearly a favourite.

LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

Paper 0486/43

Paper 43 (Closed Books)

Key Messages

1. *In poetry questions meaning, significance and personal response need to be explored first, then how the writer uses language for effect to create that meaning.*
2. *Language needs to be discussed in prose extracts.*
3. *The discussion of punctuation, form and of stage directions in drama contributes nothing without reference to meaning.*
4. *There needs to be far more focus on the key words in a question. Words such as ‘explore’, ‘explore the ways’, ‘how’, ‘how far,’ ‘vividly’, ‘memorably’, ‘powerful’, ‘dramatic’, ‘moving’.*
5. *Quotations need to support points, not to be merely added. They should be relatively brief and integrated into the flow of the argument.*

General Comments

Prose questions were generally well answered, detailed and appreciative of themes and characters, with much personal engagement with the texts. Drama answers were, perhaps inevitably, mostly from a reader's perspective rather than an audience's. On the whole extracts were answered more competently than the discursive essay; this is because the extracts demand a closer engagement with language. There were some very good empathic answers with much textual evidence; weaker answers kept repeating the emotions of the character. Generally candidates did not include enough textual echo or reference to relevant details during their thoughts on the relevant moment. Sometimes the moment itself was not tightly enough focused upon. At times the character (such as Muni, in **Question 36**) was limited to repeating the same thing several times in the monologue.

Essay structure improves year on year. There are very few essays now which lack introductions and conclusions, linked paragraphs, and points supported by textual evidence; though there are still examples of formulaic introductions which contribute very little. For example, where candidates' essay structure was less effective, this was often because they were inclined to provide lengthy introductions; detailed paraphrase; unnecessary biographical accompaniment; and broad discussion of related social issues arising from text. Many candidates referred closely and regularly to the question, though some relied much too heavily on general and sometimes arguable assertions. As often, concise answers with precise points tended to score more highly than longer rambling essays

Plenty of candidates showed good knowledge and understanding of their texts, but a fair number of these candidates nonetheless produced limited responses because they overlooked the need to focus on an author's methods and techniques; the 'How' or 'In what ways' of the question.

The use of quotations could be improved in the work of some candidates. There was often a lack of connection between the point and the quotation as if the candidate had merely put it in because s/he remembered it, not because it supported the point being made. In the best answers, quotations were brief and integrated seamlessly into the argument.

We have argued for so long that candidates need to discuss language that now it has almost gone too far, with some essays about nothing else. In responses to poetry some candidates have written pages and pages of line-by-line paraphrase, or line-by-line identification of literary terms with no discussion of the meaning of the poem at all. All the sophisticated and complex language terms in the world do not compensate for lack of understanding. The mention of 'lexis fields' which add little to the candidate's understanding of poetry is particularly tiresome: "Drummer Hodge" has a lexis field of death..." And, as a corollary, as a way of tackling a poem, this clearly does not lead to the *personal appreciation* of poetry which we are looking for. Similarly the trend to write about punctuation has grown and is particularly unhelpful in commenting on passages from Shakespeare.

There were very few unfinished papers and very few rubric infringements. There was, however, a disturbing trend of informal language, as well as some Americanisation ‘mom’ and ‘gonna’, ‘kinda’. There was also less use of quotational evidence and less accuracy when dealing with titles, authors and quotations.

The entry for this component was quite small, so it is not possible to comment on performance on all of the individual questions.

Comments on Specific Questions

Section A: DRAMA

ARTHUR MILLER: *All My Sons*

Question 1

At the beginning of the play the world seems peaceful, and the three men seem at ease on a beautiful Sunday morning. On the other hand, Keller is perhaps not fully at ease; he seems aware of his own ignorance and that the world has moved on. There is the fallen tree, which from the conversation seems to have considerable significance. There is the mysterious reference to horoscopes. Candidates seemed unable to discuss much of this extract, except for the tree symbolism and characters ‘not looking up’ as others entered. The strongest answers focused on Keller’s concern about money and business, his traditional values, and his preference for the past. Many candidates understood foreshadowing techniques and wrote well about them. Very few candidates discussed the staging - the back yard that protects and the poplars that surround.

Question 2

Ann Deever might be thought a moving figure for the following reasons: she lost her loved one in the war, and she has fallen in love with his brother, who over three years has done little to suggest that her feelings are reciprocated. When she discovers her feelings are reciprocated, she meets Kate’s opposition. Finally she discovers the truth about her father and Joe Keller, with all that means in regard to her treatment of her father and to her marrying into the Keller family. What the future holds for her must be very doubtful. Candidates worked well with Ann Deever, understanding that she is a moral guide; better candidates understood that she is flawed. Some candidates did not provide much quotational evidence for their assertions, and this led to a much weaker answer. Candidates were able to recall key moments in the play well, and how Ann remained central to these and to the conflict that runs through.

Question 3

Jim Bayliss is at this moment in a state of considerable perturbation. He is likely to be thinking about what he has heard from George; about the mood that George is in; about the effect that this will have on the Keller family and on Ann; and about what he is going to say to everyone, and his friend Joe in particular. There were so few answers to this question that it is not possible to make comments on performance.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Julius Caesar*

There were so few answers to these questions that it is not possible to make general comments on performance.

Question 4

This follows the meeting with Cassius and Casca on the occasion when Caesar was offered the crown, and immediately precedes the meeting with all the conspirators. Brutus has been unable to sleep. He is agonising over whether Caesar is a threat or not, and attempting to justify the assassination to himself. The letter helps to some extent to persuade him to go forward.

Question 5

Octavius is the peevish Schoolboy – he has youth but also determination, and is bent on revenge. Antony may appear to be just a limb of Caesar to start with, but his behaviour following the assassination shows much more conviction. They are both quite ruthless in their treatment of Lepidus. Cassius is biased against Antony from the beginning and the feeling is mutual.

Question 6

Cassius will be satisfied at the way the meeting has gone. He will be reflecting on the details – the issues of Cicero and the oath, and on the way in which he has managed to manipulate Brutus. He will be thinking about the way forward. He may be giving his opinions of his fellow conspirators, and his contempt for Caesar.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *The Tempest*

Question 7

The extract immediately follows the masque blessing the union of Ferdinand and Miranda, and represents an abrupt (and dramatic) change of mood. Some comment might have been made about the philosophical dimension of what Prospero says, and on the way Prospero excuses himself to Ferdinand. Ariel's description of how he has treated the conspirators was worthy of comment. There were few answers to this question, and most referred only to surface action.

Question 8

Miranda and Ferdinand fall in love at first sight. Miranda's inexperience of humans may account for this, and Ferdinand's distressed state of mind, supposing his father dead, may have made him particularly susceptible. Miranda attempts to defy her father, and Ferdinand accepts confinement and hard labour in order to be able to have some contact with Miranda, but the progress of the relationship is orchestrated by Prospero. There were few answers but these were answered rather well in terms of the relationship between Miranda and Ferdinand. There was too little negotiation with language to really reward candidates for a response to 'moving', however.

Question 9

Alonso believes his son may have drowned, and will be distressed and anxious to find him.

He may be thinking about the double loss of his now-married daughter. Given his state of mind in Act 2 Scene 1, he may even be wishing that the shipwreck had claimed him, too, as a victim. He may be thinking about the emptiness of his Neapolitan status compared with the loss he thinks he has suffered. Good answers achieved a convincing voice – grieving, regretful, possibly self-blaming, and desperate for some peace and quiet. There were too few answers to this question to make comment possible.

OSCAR WILDE: *The Importance of Being Earnest*

Question 10

Cecily appears the dutiful student but clearly is not, as the end of the extract makes plain. She knows exactly how to manipulate Miss Prism. Miss Prism is clearly much taken with Chasuble, and needs little encouragement to discover she has a headache and needs fresh air. What Chasuble feels is hilariously made plain by his unfortunate remark about hanging on Miss Prism's lips. Candidates struggled at times to discuss why humour is humorous. There was also much discussion on Gwendolyn's diary writing, but only in terms of a literal response rather than why it was funny or what Wilde's purpose was. Candidates made more reference to a modern interpretation than expected; this was not a useful discussion to offer. Most candidates were able to discuss why there was an amusing yet awkward moment with Dr Chasuble's metaphorical speech.

Question 11

Since this is such an open question, in the two moments chosen by the candidate there should be ample evidence of Wilde's humour and an understanding of why it is productive of laughter. Candidates on the whole did not use comedic terminology apart from 'irony'; there was much narrative response to this question since candidates struggled to analyse why Wilde's writing is humorous. Candidates also became confused about the plot and therefore spent precious time explaining what was happening.

Question 12

Algernon may well be in a state of some confusion, his happiness mixed with apprehension. He is likely to be thinking what a lively and beautiful girl has entrapped him, about the loss of bachelor status and all that incurs, and about the acquiring of a long lost brother, and the effect that will have on him. There were few answers here; most were unable to assume suitable a voice and it was particularly noticeable when informal language was used.

Section B: POETRY

THOMAS HARDY: Selected Poems

Question 13

The speaker in *On the Departure Platform* remembers the departure in great detail. The tone is nostalgic and romantic. He reflects on how life has changed/moved on, and is almost despairing in the final stanza. The imagery associated with the lover is particularly striking and worthy of comment. Quite a number of candidates saw the poem as being about the death of the loved one, and some interpreted it as being about going to war. Unfortunately in these cases the theories were not sufficiently backed up by textual evidence.

Question 14

The time of year and the coldness with the imagery of death and aridity reflect the poet's frame of mind. The thrush conveys optimism – singing despite its frailty – and suggests that there might be hope of something beyond this life: 'the blessed Hope'. Candidates really flourished with this question, and there was a real sense of engagement with the death imagery and the joy that came with the thrush.

Question 15

In *Neutral Tones*, the speaker is bitter and appears to have been betrayed. His lover is described in very unattractive terms and his life has been ruined. In *At the Word 'Farewell'* the ending is happier than in many of the poems, but the uncertainty of the speaker comes through vividly. The couple are on the verge of parting, but he tries to salvage the situation.

SONGS OF OURSELVES: from Part 4

Question 16

This was probably the most popular question on the paper. Candidates needed to comment on the anthropomorphism and speculate on the feelings of the cockroach. They might have commented on the question in lines 12 and 13 of the poem, and the poet's own answer to it. This question and poem allowed weaker candidates to flourish in terms of forming a clear argument that they could hang their analysis on. Unfortunately more able candidates rarely achieved high reward because they did not engage with language or with figurative terminology sufficiently. For more able candidates this was often their weakest answer.

Question 17

This question allowed for some interesting analysis at times, but some confusion at others. On the whole it was accessible for able candidates, but a surprising number of less able candidates also chose to answer on the poem. Almost all were able to see that it was about writer's block, but there were varying degrees of success in relating this idea to the imagery.

Question 18

Feelings of grief are shown in the speaker's apparently irresolute state at the start of the poem and the way in which he describes his physical reactions, for example his adoption of the foetal position. Some weaker answers focused on biographical details of Rossetti's life in order to explain his grief, and lost sight of the poem in so doing. There was some confusion about what the woodspurge symbolised and this, of course, was vital to an understanding of the poem. There was not enough reference to language on the whole for high reward.

Section C: PROSE

TSITSI DANGAREMBGA: *Nervous Conditions*

Question 19

The context is that this is Tambu's first day at the mission, and she is still discovering how different life is here from her life at the homestead. The naivety of Tambu's amusement at seeing her aunt use the tea-strainer reveals differences in values between homestead and mission. Life at the mission is relatively lavish, and this reveals the privations of life in the homestead more vividly. Tambu's mishap while drinking may be seen as amusing, as may Nyasha's boisterous exchange with her mother at the end of the extract. There were not many answers to this question, but of those, most were able to pick up on the contrast between the two places and they saw some humour in the tea-strainer.

Question 20

The question focuses on the varying effects of Babamukuru's generosity, and responses needed to concentrate more closely on the recipients than on Babamukuru himself. Some of those who benefit include Tambu, her older brother, her parents, Lucia, and the School of which he is headteacher. Candidates might have argued that Babamukuru's generosity benefits himself, by confirming his patriarchal role and boosting his self-esteem, but so few candidates attempted this question that it is not possible to comment.

Question 21

Babamukuru has been keen to deny that Nyasha needed psychiatric help, but has been persuaded by his brother-in-law. He may be torn between concern for his daughter's well-being, and his reaction to a challenge to his assumption that his word is law in his household. He is a conscientious professional returning to run his School – thoughts about his daily routine may feature. He will be deciding what to do about Tambu, who is a passenger in the car. He may be contemplating the future for Nyasha and for the family as a whole. Good answers will capture a voice conscious of his public image and dignity, but perhaps privately beginning to question previous certainties. Again there were few if any responses to this question.

ANITA DESAI: *Fasting, Feasting*

Question 22

The process that has been involved in bringing this marriage about should be dealt with briefly, though focus needed to be firmly on the extract. The marriage is completely joyless. The 'sullen' bridegroom and all his family who ignore Uma make it a particularly miserable occasion. The journey is uncomfortable and disgusting, and Uma is treated like a piece of luggage and ignored. Then her husband abandons her. There were some strong answers which explored the extract in detail, and engaged with the language and imagery. Sympathy for Uma was very clear and most candidates wrote very fluently about the ways in which her expectations of marriage have been dashed.

Question 23

The completely different climate and appearance of the country make Arun uncomfortable. He is unhappy in the 'dorm' where nobody communicates with him, and he is unable to engage. He has a sense of alienation in the Patton house – nobody has much to do with him apart from Mrs Patton, whose attentions are smothering. He can not eat the food. He has to escape by jogging. This question inspired candidates to explore the wider issues which Desai is critiquing, as well as showcasing a good knowledge of the text. Many candidates chose moments where Aran was isolated and lonely, and were able to provide a debate as well as some expertly chosen evidence. Stronger candidates were able to engage with the political and social debate, whereas weaker candidates found plenty to talk about in terms of food, family and friends.

Question 24

Melanie is a very unhappy girl with an eating disorder, and it appears that she is aware of what she is doing. We should expect reflections on her dysfunctional family, her thoughts about food, and on Arun's presence in the house. This is not the only time that Arun comes across her in such a state, and the night-time incident may be referred to. Melanie is not very articulate and her 'voice' will reflect her rather taciturn and sullen character. There were a few examples of answers to this question and they usually demonstrated understanding of this tortured soul, of her self-loathing and hatred of her family. Some seemed to think that she is desperate for her mother's approval, but this does not seem to be altogether borne out by the text.

KIRAN DESAI: *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*

Question 25

The key words in the question are 'mysterious and amusing'. There is either the ludicrousness, or the mystery, of the single guava fruit guarded by the monkeys and Sampath's final escape. Amusement comes from Mr. Chawla, who has never shrieked with such despair (his cash cow has vanished); from poor Miss Jyotsna, who has lost her 'Baba'; and from the desperation of the search. The passage is lively, has symbolism and chaos, and candidates were able to explore these expertly.

Question 26

There are a number of vivid descriptions of Shahkot's noise and heat, its chaotic services and its lack of any apparent order. However, some aspects of it could be seen as part of a vibrant life in which nothing is done by half, and in which the streets pulse with colour and theatre. Very few candidates chose to answer the question, but those who did were able to do so very well.

Question 27

Hungry Hop is likely to be thinking how besotted he is with the girl who bit off a part of his ear and that he has never met such a resolute young woman. He may be incredulous that such a girl is attracted to him and having continual doubts whether he, of all people, can possibly continue to keep the attraction of such a forceful personality. He will be waiting in agony for the next missive from her.

GEORGE ELIOT: *Silas Marner*

Question 28

This was a very popular text, and a very popular question. Sympathy comes from the way in which Silas is regarded by the villagers, from his loneliness, and the way in which it makes money a substitute for friendship. The broken pot is significant. The reasons for his arrival in Raveloe might be mentioned though they are not the focus of the question. Good answers explored the writing in some detail – the physical descriptions, the sensuousness of the treatment of the guineas etc. Candidates were able to discuss Silas's physical reduction, loss of faith, lack of love and his relationship with inanimate objects well.

Question 29

This question offered a completely open choice. Suitable moments might be various occasions in the Rainbow Inn, the party at the Red House, or its aftermath. The village people might be either the ordinary folk or those of higher birth. What was not required was straight narrative or description; good answers explored character and the way in which it is revealed through speech and through authorial comment.

Question 30

Godfrey announces the discovery to Nancy in Chapter 18. He would probably be thinking about the reasons for the draining of the stone-pit 16 years after the disappearance of Dunsey, and the circumstances of Dunsey's disappearance. He will be shocked and horrified, and thinking about the implications for himself, Nancy and Marner. There were so few answers to this question that it is not possible to make comments on performance.

SUSAN HILL: *I'm the King of the Castle*

Question 31

Hill memorably conveys Kingshaw's terror in every physical detail and through his thoughts. Flight endows the crow with frightening power to attack at will. Hooper watched and watched, almost as if the crow is an extension of his malevolent personality. Many candidates were able to engage in discussion about Kingshaw's mental and physical anguish, as well as the horror and pursuit of the crow. The most able candidates made strong links between the crow and Hooper. Essays were even and thorough.

Question 32

On the one hand, Mrs Kingshaw might be felt to warrant sympathy because she is a lonely widow and she has a child to bring up whom she appears to love. She does not have a strong character and is often fearful of the future. On the other hand it might be felt that she is a stupid and vain woman, and that her pursuit of a stable future for herself makes her a dreadful parent. She re-orders reality to suit her own desires, and fails utterly to take seriously her son's unhappiness. She sides with Hooper and she is directly responsible for Kingshaw's suicide. This question inspired some extreme responses. Some candidates were very strongly of the opinion that Mrs Kingshaw was not a sympathetic character. Others seemed to think that they were only able to discuss the issues which made her sympathetic. The strongest answers came from a tracing of her character throughout the text.

Question 33

Kingshaw is likely to be thinking with trepidation that yet again he and his mother are on the move, and that once more he is going to have live in a stranger's home with his mother as a virtual servant. Even worse, there is going to be boy of his own age in situ, with whom he will be expected to be friends - but at least after a time he will be able to escape back to his boarding School. There were more empathetic answers on this text than on any others. Unfortunately candidates did not attempt to assume a voice and there was some Americanism and informal phrasing. Some candidates wrote about after their arrival at the house – the wrong moment.

from *Stories of Ourselves*

Question 34

The question is focused on the descriptive qualities of the extract, so good answers will explore the language and imagery in detail. They needed to comment on the build up to this moment - the excitement of the girls and their preparations; the visual impressions – the light and colour and contrast; the movement; and Leila's feelings. There were only a few answers, but they generally understood what was expected and picked out relevant details and attempted to comment on them.

Question 35

Feelings may vary from complete disgust, to admiration, to sympathy. Good answers evaluated and supported a carefully constructed argument. The callousness of T and his disinterest in empathising with Old Misery was commented on, as was his background, his ability to lead the other boys and the complete lack of anything personal in his destructiveness. Few good answers were seen to this question, surprisingly. Many candidates got bogged down in the theory that T is a war-damaged child, and paid scant attention to what he actually says and does.

Question 36

Sam would be feeling sadness and disappointment and possibly anger, though there is no real evidence for that in the text. He would be thinking about his feelings for Sophy over the years, and her refusal to marry him, and about her husband and her son. He would be regretting missed opportunities, especially in the light of his business success. There were very few, if any, attempts at this question.

LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

Paper 0486/51

Paper 51 (Closed Books - B)

Key Messages

- In response to Nineteenth Century texts in particular, candidates need to avoid giving lengthy passages of background information in their answers.
- In answer to passage-based questions, candidates need to focus on the question and on the writing and to avoid providing a narrative re-telling of events.
- The strongest answers to discursive and non passage-based poetry questions came from candidates who used wide ranging supporting details from the text, and offered direct quotations from it.
- The most effective answers to empathic questions showed knowledge of the text and moment, as well as producing a 'voice' for the character written in an appropriate style and register.
- The strongest answers to poetry questions showed clear understanding of the poem and commented on the poet's effects.

General Comments

Work on the new texts, *Northanger Abbey* and *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, was in general very strong. Some candidates, however, spent valuable time showing knowledge of etiquette in Georgian society, the Gothic novel, the bildungsroman, moral aesthetics and Victorian London, at the expense of concentration on the question set. Some candidates strained to include material on themes which they struggled to make directly relevant to the question set. Passage-based answers to both *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* suffered from a tendency to narrate the events in the passage and to put it in context, rather than focussing sharply on the question. Some candidates continue to confuse Hermia with Helena and Demetrius with Lysander. There is deliberate chaos and confusion in the play, of course, but this is essential knowledge that candidates have to learn. Candidates would continue to benefit from an awareness of what is happening on stage in response to drama texts, and to enable them to select material effectively.

Work on poetry continues to improve, and there were some sophisticated and perceptive commentaries. There is still evidence, however, of insecure knowledge both in terms of content and poetic technique. Some candidates referred to stanzas as paragraphs and many dubious assertions were made about enjambment and caesura, and juxtaposition was often used when contrast was meant. There were answers which listed poetic techniques without developing comment on their effect. Candidates who had detailed knowledge of the whole selection, and had tackled their study with enthusiasm and personal response, reaped the benefit.

There were many strong discursive responses this session, especially when answers were clearly organised, well evidenced, well-balanced and wide ranging.

Responses to empathic questions were often strong, with many candidates showing a sophisticated grasp of their chosen character and of the context of the question. The strongest answers paid attention to the character's profession, class, and thoughts and feelings at that precise moment in the text.

There were very few rubric infringements or inadequate responses, though some answers went little beyond narrative or paraphrase.

Comments on Specific Questions

Northanger Abbey

Question 1

The strongest answers here focused on the entertainment value of Isabella's insincerity contrasted with Catherine's naivety, and the fun factor in their trivial pursuit of Gothic horror. The strongest answers were aware of Austen's use of satire, hyperbole and irony, without necessarily using those terms. A significant number of candidates were distracted by historical background, and insisted that Catherine and Isabella were 'upper class'. A clear grasp of Isabella's inconsistency with details of the exaggerations, the trivialities, the rhetorical questions and the disloyalty marked out a strong answer.

Question 2

Most candidates chose their moments effectively (for example Catherine's conflict of interest in Bath between the Thorpes and the Tilneys; Catherine's wild imagination of the murder of Mrs Tilney), and commented on the amusement factor in Catherine's inexperience. More effective responses could support their choices with details of the writing.

Question 3

Candidates conveyed Henry's indignation and showed sound knowledge of the text. The best answers grasped his restraint, rationality and sense of honour along with a determination not to submit to his father's ungentlemanly act. Some answers ranted and raved uncharacteristically or were overly romantic. Most answers were, at the least, suitably expressed and many were outstanding, both in the moment and capturing his central feelings of shock, embarrassment and indignation.

Carol Ann Duffy: Selected Poems

Question 4

Answers to this question ranged widely. The least successful showed little understanding or paraphrased the poem. There were many interpretations where the missing loved one was considered to be dead or estranged. At the other end of the scale, there were excellent explorations of both meaning and effects. Such answers saw the layers of meaning in the title, and explored the complex process of memory and imagination inside the poet's head. Some noted the symbolic drift into darkness and the growing uncertainty and unreality. The strongest responses showed an insightful focus on the vividness of the writing.

Question 5

This was not a popular option but those who chose it showed knowledge of both poems. Greater use of direct quotation would have improved the responses.

Question 6

Stealing provoked some interesting responses. Some tended to treat the poem as prose, and explored the sociological and psychological explanations of the persona's behaviour at the expense of the language. Successful answers focused on the poetry, especially the imagery of violence and coldness, and explored the presentation of the persona's unpleasant characteristics, whilst also seeing that the Dramatic Monologue form engages, to an extent, our sympathies with him or her.

The Siege

Question 7

Answers were effective here when candidates paid attention to the description, and to the symbolic meaning of the snow for Anna. Such responses were sharply attentive to the context of the snowfall in times of war. Less successful responses took a narrative approach to the passage, or treated it as if it were an unseen prose appreciation. There was a tendency to see nothing but joy and exhilaration, and to skate over the ominous elements in the final paragraph.

Question 8

There were many well-balanced, wide ranging and well-supported answers to this question. Candidates sometimes glossed over Mikhail's affair with Marina or condemned it outright. Many criticised Mikhail for opting out of family life but others sympathised with his loss of career and, interestingly, thought that he had been psychologically damaged by Vera's death.

Question 9

Some responses would have been improved by closer reference to the first meeting between Anna and Andrei, and exploration of its context. Most found a 'voice' for Andrei but these often expressed only generalised feelings of attraction. Strong responses gave well-selected details of the meeting, and mentioned Mikhail's diary and Andrei's work in the hospital.

Poems Deep and Dangerous

Question 10

There was some sensitive exploration of the characters through comment on the language, structure and form of the poem, such as differentiating the young and the mature wife and the single man by scrutinising the descriptions of their dirty linen. One candidate described the structure as one 'that tumbled along, like the accepting people it described and the washing that turned round without judgement or interruption'. The sound effects were also explored. Less successful responses seemed ill-prepared, including paraphrase and misreading.

There were too few answers to **Question 11** and **Question 12** to make meaningful comment.

A Midsummer Night's Dream

Question 13

There was strong evidence of detailed textual knowledge here, and the best responses managed to ground their understanding of the evolving situation and feelings in an exploration of the language. Less successful responses referred to Helena's feelings only and overlooked the dramatic effectiveness of the language, such as the contrasting couplets between Hermia and Helena at the start of the scene. Lysander and Hermia's speeches about their love and elopement were ignored, and many continued to confuse the characters.

Strong answers outlined the contrasting feelings of the two girls and how these were conveyed; explored the romantic imagery of Hermia and Lysander; commented on the drama of Helena's betrayal of her friend contrasting with their kindness to her; and noted her bitterness, envy, desperation, sense of injustice and views on 'blind Cupid' and their contribution to the themes of the play.

Question 14

Most answers here showed knowledge of the plot, and referred to the Indian Boy and the love potion plot against Titania. Fewer commented on his later pity and compassion. Close textual reference, especially to the language, and an evaluation of Oberon's behaviour appeared only in the strongest answers. There was a marked tendency to look at Oberon's attitude to his wife through twenty-first century eyes.

Question 15

This was a popular choice but some answers were generalised and bland, with little close reference to '*Pyramus and Thisbe*' or to Bottom's experience in the woods. Many were impressive in capturing his egoism, desire to play every part, lack of awareness of the mirth the play induces, and desire to see '*Bottom's Dream*' as the next production. In many cases Bottom seemed to have been allocated a wife and family missing from the play, and some candidates made him far too educated and articulate.

The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde

Question 16

The majority of responses were very sound, with candidates exploring the effects of the setting, the similes and allusions, and thus the ‘striking’ nature of this introduction to Hyde. The strongest answers were firmly rooted in the writing, aware of context, focused on the question, and showed understanding of the mystery and suspense set up by the genuine cheque. Many commented on the reactions of the onlookers, spotting the ‘wild as Harpies’ allusion and seeing that the crowd’s reactions mirrored the evil in Hyde. Others commented that the broad demonic references to Hyde, rather than direct description, makes him more horrifying in the reader’s imagination. Less successful was a tendency to be distracted by background material (reputation, duality, hypocrisy, London fog...). There was some misreading of the identity of the ‘Sawbones’; some candidates thought that Hyde wanted to pay the family and others confused Enfield and Utterson.

Question 17

The best answers understood the conflict between Lanyon and Jekyll over the boundaries of Science, commented on the horror of the transformation scene and the importance of Lanyon’s letter in unravelling the mystery. Weaker answers confused Lanyon and Utterson.

Question 18

The strongest ‘Uttersons’ pondered the Jekyll/Hyde connection, expressed concerns over his reputation, and reflected on Jekyll’s possible past misdemeanours. Utterson’s profession and class were reflected in his manner of speaking. Less successful ‘voices’ tended to overstate his indignation at being asked to ‘assist’ Hyde.

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof

Question 19

This was generally answered well. Most clearly outlined the causes of tension and referred to the scene on stage. The strongest answers selected the main moments of tension between the various characters; understood context and characterisation; grasped the significance of the silence after Reverend Tooker’s ‘stork and reaper’ joke; and commented on the intensity of the language, as well as of the feelings rampaging through this uncomfortable birthday party. Weaker answers wrote about ‘what’ rather than ‘how’, with lengthy exposition of the context but little focus on the creation of tension.

Question 20

Answers were well-developed and well-balanced, with commentary on Maggie’s unrequited love, determination, poor treatment by the Pollitt family and vulnerability on the one hand, and her materialism, greed, cattiness and mendacity on the other. Her affair with Skipper was only considered in the strongest answers, and her humour was generally underappreciated. Sound answers compared her favourably to Mae’s transparent insincerity and Brick’s directionless detachment.

Question 21

There were many faithful reproductions of Big Daddy’s ‘voice’, with bilious attacks on Mae, Gooper, the No-Necks, preachers and Big Momma. The most successful also reflected the moment in the play, with Big Daddy pondering Brick’s future.

LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

Paper 0486/52

Paper 52 (Closed Books - B)

Key Messages

- Candidates need to treat Drama texts - particularly Shakespeare - as plays not prose, and show awareness of action and staging.
- In response to Nineteenth Century novels, candidates need to avoid giving lengthy passages of background information in their answers.
- In answer to passage-based questions, in particular on the Shakespeare question, candidates need to stand back and select material carefully rather than working through the passage chronologically.
- The strongest answers to discursive questions came from candidates who used wide-ranging supporting details from the text, and offered direct quotations from it.
- The most effective answers to empathic questions showed knowledge of the text and moment, as well as producing a 'voice' for the character written in an appropriate style and register.
- The strongest answers to poetry questions showed clear understanding of the poem and commented on the poet's effects.

General Comments

Although there was strong work on both *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, it was notable that candidates were happier considering staging; dramatic techniques such as dramatic irony; the creation of tension and climax; and humour in relation to the latter rather than the former. The ability to comment on the effects of language in drama, poetry and prose often distinguished a strong answer. This was particularly true of answers to questions on *Northanger Abbey*, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and the poems of Carol Ann Duffy.

There was a tendency to refer to background material on the Nineteenth Century texts which often detracted from a clear focus on the question set.

Candidates would be well-advised to consider selection of material carefully before responding to passage-based questions. Sometimes candidates worked thoroughly through the passage from beginning to end but took a narrative approach, not selecting material which was best suited to answer the question. This meant they did not reach the end of the passage, and thus omitted often vital material.

The strongest discursive answers used direct quotation, ranging throughout the text, to support a clearly constructed argument. Too many candidates who chose these questions did not seem to have such textual knowledge at their disposal.

There were some lively responses to empathic questions, with strong candidates capturing the voices of General Tilney, Dr Lanyon and Big Momma particularly well and generally showing sound knowledge of the text.

There were many strong poetry answers, especially from candidates who understood the meaning and context of the poem, engaged personally with it, and commented fully on the effects of the style. Weaker answers tend to 'explain' the language or paraphrase the poem.

There were few infringements of the rubric or inadequate responses. Candidates would be advised not to write over-lengthy plans; count words; or write introductions and conclusions which give biographical information, rewrite the question or repeat, at some length, points already made.

Comments on Specific Questions

Northanger Abbey

Question 1

Candidates who were able to fully detail the irony of Catherine's misconception and Austen's parody of Gothic literature (the atmospheric setting, pathetic fallacy, hyperbole, clichés...) produced effective answers. Such answers also showed awareness of the broader comic context when the precious 'manuscript' turns out to be a laundry list. Less successful responses missed the parody and gave a 'straight' reading, or struggled with the 'amusing' aspects of the writing - some misreading 'amusing' as 'amazing'.

Question 2

Most candidates declared that the marriage between Henry and Catherine would be happy, citing their common interests, shared rectory background, sense of right, and obvious personal affection. Any misgivings about Catherine's immaturity were dismissed as a developing aspect of her character with Henry as mentor. Thus answers were a little bland, without reference to their unequal intellectual capacities or Henry's admonition of her at Northanger.

Question 3

Many candidates managed to capture the General's indignation and characteristic 'voice', focussing on his mercenary nature and the belief that he was acting on Henry's behalf. Strong responses were aware of the details of John Thorpe's interference and wrote concisely.

Carol Ann Duffy: Selected Poems

Question 4

There were some fine answers to this question which noted the progression of feeling, and analysed the symbolism of the blind toy, the loose tooth simile and the snake shedding its skin. Stronger answers dealt well with 'all childhood is an emigration' and considered the implications of the ending in conveying the speaker's continuing uncertainty of her origins. One candidate commented perceptively on how the word 'fell' conveys complete loss of control and how 'bawling' is more visceral than 'crying.' Less successful responses explained the similes rather than analysing their effect, misunderstood that the 'red room' is a car, and overstated the difference between England and Scotland where the language is the same even if the accent and dialect may be different.

Question 5

There was much thoughtful and impassioned comment on the human exploitation of animals, and the effective use of dramatic monologue for conveying empathy. One candidate commented on the repetition of 'the man' and how he is 'above' the dolphins in each stanza. The toys were seen as symbols of oppression and the 'groove' image intelligently associated with needles circling vinyl. Less successful answers understood the central idea but did not respond to the detail of the poem.

Question 6

Most responses here dealt with the images and how they conveyed alienation. Strong answers made intelligent comment on the effect of the second-person pronoun, and the way feelings of nostalgia are evoked in the second stanza.

The Siege

Question 7

Successful answers to this question knew the context - that Anna was going out to buy the burzhuika; understood that monetary value had been replaced by survival value; and registered Marina's emaciation and the need for safety in an increasingly desperate and lawless city. The interdependence of the 'family' shows the changes since the beginning of the novel. Only the strongest answers commented on Marina's equation of King Lear and Stalin. Less effective answers tended to narrate, gave more attention to the social changes in Leningrad than to the passage, or ignored the language.

Question 8

There were too few answers to this question to make meaningful comment.

Question 9

Stronger candidates captured Fedya's hatred of the enemy, his party loyalty, his feelings for his son, his admiration for Anna's strength and acknowledgement of her kindness. Weaker answers contained expressions such as 'Heil Stalin'.

Poems Deep and Dangerous

Question 10

Responses empathised with Clare's depiction of unrequited love and its associated pains. Successful answers explored the powerful images of suffering, and his shift of tone and imagery in the third stanza. There was some fruitful attention to the description of physical sensation. Weaker responses tended to work through explaining and paraphrasing, without attention to the language. Biographical detail intruded at times.

Question 11

There was a tendency here to speculate on the nature of the accident and not pay attention to the nature of the 'gift', but several candidates fully understood the tenderness of the role reversal.

Question 12

There were too few responses to make meaningful comment.

A Midsummer Night's Dream

Question 13

This question was well answered when candidates focused clearly on the drama - of Hermia's dilemma; the harshness of Athenian law; her defiance of Theseus and her father; the conflict between Lysander and Demetrius - and saw the significance of the scene in terms of both plot and themes. The best answers looked at the language, particularly Theseus's bleak characterisation of virginity and Hermia's defence of her 'soul's sovereignty'. Many explored Theseus's desire to be fair and to persuade Hermia of a course which would do her the least harm. They also understood that Lysander is joking when he suggests that Demetrius marry Egeus, and commented on his spirited defence. There were interesting comments on women as possessions and on patriarchy, but sometimes at the expense of a clear exploration of the passage itself. Less effective answers quoted without comment on the language or retold the story. Another common misconception was that Demetrius 'making love' to Helena meant he had slept with her. Candidates also need to be alerted to the necessity of selecting the most relevant material.

Question 14

Many candidates appreciated the humour of the Queen of the fairies being in love with a workman with an ass's head. Sometimes, however, answers went little beyond this, and direct and detailed textual support was often not in evidence. The strongest answers commented on the language, and the drama such as the audience's amusement when Titania has the potion removed from her eyes and sees Bottom.

Question 15

There were some outstanding answers to this question showing excellent knowledge of the text and moment, but many were repetitive or one-track on love for Helena. Some digressed into the Mechanicals' performance.

The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde

Question 16

There was a wide range of responses to this question. The strongest explored the description of the house as representative of the Jekyll/Hyde duality, though few commented, surprisingly, on the chemical apparatus. They picked up on the descriptions of Jekyll, sickened by what Hyde had done, and saw the oddness in his insisting that he had done with Hyde and that Hyde would not be seen again. They also commented on Utterson being misled by the letter. The best candidates could establish the context and make distinctions between reading and re-reading the passage in terms of response and understanding. Less focused responses used the passage as a starting point for narrative, or were distracted into thematic discussion instead of analysis of the passage.

Question 17

The most popular moments chosen were the murder of Carew, the trampling of the child, and Hyde's transformation before Dr Lanyon. Most commented on setting and atmosphere, the construction of the novel, and the effect of the violence on the reader's understanding of Hyde. The strongest responses appreciated the emotional, philosophical and psychological horror of these scenes.

Question 18

The best recreations of Dr Lanyon avoided hysteria, though conveyed shock and awe; understood the former friendship and scientific differences; expressed the full extent of his condemnation of Jekyll; and made his extreme despair clear. Most reflected his knowledge of impending death. Many reproduced Stevenson's description of the metamorphosis in impressive detail.

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof

Question 19

This task was very popular and mainly very well done. In less successful answers the emphasis was almost exclusively on Maggie as a 'powerful' member of the Pollitt family and wife to Brick, rather than Maggie as a 'dramatic character'. Thus the focus fell on Maggie's judgmental attitude towards everyone else and her powers as a social 'commentator' (on Big Daddy's party). The very best, however, had a sharp sense of context and were able to suggest that this is only a superficial domination, and that she is trying desperately hard to get a response from Brick... that she, in fact, feels powerless, vulnerable and insecure. There was much convincing discussion and exemplification of Maggie's powerful wit, beauty, pride in her sexual allure, outspokenness, malicious enjoyment of Mae and Gooper's discomfiture, her mercurial switches, her domination of the stage and the conversation, with perceptive comment on Williams's use of stage directions in terms of their effect on the audience.

Question 20

Most candidates considered that Mae and Gooper operate as a unit, but with Mae having the sharper tongue and willingness to go further than Gooper in pursuit of the inheritance. There was consideration of their role in the play and by implication how they are portrayed. Candidates used reference to incidents in the play but could have used further quotation. Weaker answers saw them as a model loving couple, missing their sheer nastiness.

Question 21

Most Big Mommas were quite upbeat, saying how mistaken Big Daddy is in thinking she wanted control and deceiving herself as to his real feelings for her. Others pursued a shocked and hurt version of her thoughts. Candidates gave her credible thoughts about Brick, Maggie, Mae and Gooper. Voices were generally good, with echoes of what Big Daddy has said and their conversations elsewhere in the play. Some candidates had her knowing he has cancer of which she is unaware at this point in the play. The best monologues covered a wide range of emotions: joy and relief at Big Daddy's supposed 'recovery' and that he is back in charge; and reflection on the devotion and support she has shown him during a long marriage. Less impressive monologues focused on just one of these strands.

LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

Paper 0486/53

Paper 53 (Closed Books - B)

Key Messages

- In response to Nineteenth Century texts in particular, candidates need to avoid giving lengthy passages of background information in their answers.
- In answer to passage-based questions, candidates need to focus on the question and on the writing and to avoid providing a narrative re-telling of events.
- The strongest answers to discursive and non passage-based poetry questions came from candidates who used wide ranging supporting details from the text, and offered direct quotations from it.
- The most effective answers to empathic questions showed knowledge of the text and moment, as well as producing a 'voice' for the character written in an appropriate style and register.
- The strongest answers to poetry questions showed clear understanding of the poem and commented on the poet's effects.

General Comments

Work on the new texts, *Northanger Abbey* and *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, was in general very strong. Some candidates, however, spent valuable time showing knowledge of etiquette in Georgian society, the Gothic novel, the bildungsroman, moral aesthetics and Victorian London, at the expense of concentration on the question set. Some candidates strained to include material on themes which they struggled to make directly relevant to the question set. Passage-based answers to both *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* suffered from a tendency to narrate the events in the passage and to put it in context, rather than focussing sharply on the question. Some candidates continue to confuse Hermia with Helena and Demetrius with Lysander. There is deliberate chaos and confusion in the play, of course, but this is essential knowledge that candidates have to learn. Candidates would continue to benefit from an awareness of what is happening on stage in response to drama texts, and to enable them to select material effectively.

Work on poetry continues to improve, and there were some sophisticated and perceptive commentaries. There is still evidence, however, of insecure knowledge both in terms of content and poetic technique. Some candidates referred to stanzas as paragraphs and many dubious assertions were made about enjambment and caesura, and juxtaposition was often used when contrast was meant. There were answers which listed poetic techniques without developing comment on their effect. Candidates who had detailed knowledge of the whole selection, and had tackled their study with enthusiasm and personal response, reaped the benefit.

There were many strong discursive responses this session, especially when answers were clearly organised, well evidenced, well-balanced and wide ranging.

Responses to empathic questions were often strong, with many candidates showing a sophisticated grasp of their chosen character and of the context of the question. The strongest answers paid attention to the character's profession, class, and thoughts and feelings at that precise moment in the text.

There were very few rubric infringements or inadequate responses, though some answers went little beyond narrative or paraphrase.

Comments on Specific Questions

Northanger Abbey

Question 1

The strongest answers here focused on the entertainment value of Isabella's insincerity contrasted with Catherine's naivety, and the fun factor in their trivial pursuit of Gothic horror. The strongest answers were aware of Austen's use of satire, hyperbole and irony, without necessarily using those terms. A significant number of candidates were distracted by historical background, and insisted that Catherine and Isabella were 'upper class'. A clear grasp of Isabella's inconsistency with details of the exaggerations, the trivialities, the rhetorical questions and the disloyalty marked out a strong answer.

Question 2

Most candidates chose their moments effectively (for example Catherine's conflict of interest in Bath between the Thorpes and the Tilneys; Catherine's wild imagination of the murder of Mrs Tilney), and commented on the amusement factor in Catherine's inexperience. More effective responses could support their choices with details of the writing.

Question 3

Candidates conveyed Henry's indignation and showed sound knowledge of the text. The best answers grasped his restraint, rationality and sense of honour along with a determination not to submit to his father's ungentlemanly act. Some answers ranted and raved uncharacteristically or were overly romantic. Most answers were, at the least, suitably expressed and many were outstanding, both in the moment and capturing his central feelings of shock, embarrassment and indignation.

Carol Ann Duffy: Selected Poems

Question 4

Answers to this question ranged widely. The least successful showed little understanding or paraphrased the poem. There were many interpretations where the missing loved one was considered to be dead or estranged. At the other end of the scale, there were excellent explorations of both meaning and effects. Such answers saw the layers of meaning in the title, and explored the complex process of memory and imagination inside the poet's head. Some noted the symbolic drift into darkness and the growing uncertainty and unreality. The strongest responses showed an insightful focus on the vividness of the writing.

Question 5

This was not a popular option but those who chose it showed knowledge of both poems. Greater use of direct quotation would have improved the responses.

Question 6

Stealing provoked some interesting responses. Some tended to treat the poem as prose, and explored the sociological and psychological explanations of the persona's behaviour at the expense of the language. Successful answers focused on the poetry, especially the imagery of violence and coldness, and explored the presentation of the persona's unpleasant characteristics, whilst also seeing that the Dramatic Monologue form engages, to an extent, our sympathies with him or her.

The Siege

Question 7

Answers were effective here when candidates paid attention to the description, and to the symbolic meaning of the snow for Anna. Such responses were sharply attentive to the context of the snowfall in times of war. Less successful responses took a narrative approach to the passage, or treated it as if it were an unseen prose appreciation. There was a tendency to see nothing but joy and exhilaration, and to skate over the ominous elements in the final paragraph.

Question 8

There were many well-balanced, wide ranging and well-supported answers to this question. Candidates sometimes glossed over Mikhail's affair with Marina or condemned it outright. Many criticised Mikhail for opting out of family life but others sympathised with his loss of career and, interestingly, thought that he had been psychologically damaged by Vera's death.

Question 9

Some responses would have been improved by closer reference to the first meeting between Anna and Andrei, and exploration of its context. Most found a 'voice' for Andrei but these often expressed only generalised feelings of attraction. Strong responses gave well-selected details of the meeting, and mentioned Mikhail's diary and Andrei's work in the hospital.

Poems Deep and Dangerous

Question 10

There was some sensitive exploration of the characters through comment on the language, structure and form of the poem, such as differentiating the young and the mature wife and the single man by scrutinising the descriptions of their dirty linen. One candidate described the structure as one 'that tumbled along, like the accepting people it described and the washing that turned round without judgement or interruption'. The sound effects were also explored. Less successful responses seemed ill-prepared, including paraphrase and misreading.

There were too few answers to **Question 11** and **Question 12** to make meaningful comment.

A Midsummer Night's Dream

Question 13

There was strong evidence of detailed textual knowledge here, and the best responses managed to ground their understanding of the evolving situation and feelings in an exploration of the language. Less successful responses referred to Helena's feelings only and overlooked the dramatic effectiveness of the language, such as the contrasting couplets between Hermia and Helena at the start of the scene. Lysander and Hermia's speeches about their love and elopement were ignored, and many continued to confuse the characters.

Strong answers outlined the contrasting feelings of the two girls and how these were conveyed; explored the romantic imagery of Hermia and Lysander; commented on the drama of Helena's betrayal of her friend contrasting with their kindness to her; and noted her bitterness, envy, desperation, sense of injustice and views on 'blind Cupid' and their contribution to the themes of the play.

Question 14

Most answers here showed knowledge of the plot, and referred to the Indian Boy and the love potion plot against Titania. Fewer commented on his later pity and compassion. Close textual reference, especially to the language, and an evaluation of Oberon's behaviour appeared only in the strongest answers. There was a marked tendency to look at Oberon's attitude to his wife through twenty-first century eyes.

Question 15

This was a popular choice but some answers were generalised and bland, with little close reference to '*Pyramus and Thisbe*' or to Bottom's experience in the woods. Many were impressive in capturing his egoism, desire to play every part, lack of awareness of the mirth the play induces, and desire to see 'Bottom's Dream' as the next production. In many cases Bottom seemed to have been allocated a wife and family missing from the play, and some candidates made him far too educated and articulate.

The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde

Question 16

The majority of responses were very sound, with candidates exploring the effects of the setting, the similes and allusions, and thus the ‘striking’ nature of this introduction to Hyde. The strongest answers were firmly rooted in the writing, aware of context, focused on the question, and showed understanding of the mystery and suspense set up by the genuine cheque. Many commented on the reactions of the onlookers, spotting the ‘wild as Harpies’ allusion and seeing that the crowd’s reactions mirrored the evil in Hyde. Others commented that the broad demonic references to Hyde, rather than direct description, makes him more horrifying in the reader’s imagination. Less successful was a tendency to be distracted by background material (reputation, duality, hypocrisy, London fog...). There was some misreading of the identity of the ‘Sawbones’; some candidates thought that Hyde wanted to pay the family and others confused Enfield and Utterson.

Question 17

The best answers understood the conflict between Lanyon and Jekyll over the boundaries of Science, commented on the horror of the transformation scene and the importance of Lanyon’s letter in unravelling the mystery. Weaker answers confused Lanyon and Utterson.

Question 18

The strongest ‘Uttersons’ pondered the Jekyll/Hyde connection, expressed concerns over his reputation, and reflected on Jekyll’s possible past misdemeanours. Utterson’s profession and class were reflected in his manner of speaking. Less successful ‘voices’ tended to overstate his indignation at being asked to ‘assist’ Hyde.

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof

Question 19

This was generally answered well. Most clearly outlined the causes of tension and referred to the scene on stage. The strongest answers selected the main moments of tension between the various characters; understood context and characterisation; grasped the significance of the silence after Reverend Tooker’s ‘stork and reaper’ joke; and commented on the intensity of the language, as well as of the feelings rampaging through this uncomfortable birthday party. Weaker answers wrote about ‘what’ rather than ‘how’, with lengthy exposition of the context but little focus on the creation of tension.

Question 20

Answers were well-developed and well-balanced, with commentary on Maggie’s unrequited love, determination, poor treatment by the Pollitt family and vulnerability on the one hand, and her materialism, greed, cattiness and mendacity on the other. Her affair with Skipper was only considered in the strongest answers, and her humour was generally underappreciated. Sound answers compared her favourably to Mae’s transparent insincerity and Brick’s directionless detachment.

Question 21

There were many faithful reproductions of Big Daddy’s ‘voice’, with bilious attacks on Mae, Gooper, the No-Necks, preachers and Big Momma. The most successful also reflected the moment in the play, with Big Daddy pondering Brick’s future.