

# LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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Paper 8695/11

Writing

## Key messages

- Candidates should manage their time carefully, allocating an equal amount of time for each section of the paper. Quite often the time spent on **Section A** seemed to have left candidates insufficient time to meet the required word count in **Section B** or to satisfactorily complete the task.
- Candidates must understand the importance of writing in clear, properly punctuated English, with accurate sentence demarcation, to perform well in this exam. Punctuation is a vital and essential aid to communication, especially as a guide to the structure of sentences, so it is imperative that candidates know and understand the basics of sentence construction if they are to succeed on this paper.
- Clear expression in simple and compound sentences with less variety is preferable to expression that does not flow, in long, rambling sentences. Some candidates lost control of grammar when they attempted to write in long, complex sentences. One error that occurred regularly was that of separating sentences with commas rather than full stops; another common error was writing in sentence fragments. Clear and accurate sentence demarcation is crucial, followed by the accurate use of a wider range of punctuation.
- Candidates should be aware that relevant content in the correct form is a key aspect of the overall assessment of responses for **Question 1(a)** and **Section B** tasks. To ensure that candidates understand the key requirements of each question, it may be helpful to underline key words within the question which indicate the specified form, content, audience and purpose of the tasks chosen. For example, in **Question 1(a)** the key instructions are to write the **opening of a story** and to **create a sense of drama and suspense**. In order to achieve the task, these instructions must be followed.
- Candidates who have difficulty with tense selection should focus on writing in one tense, preferably either the present tense or the simple past.
- Candidates should be encouraged to proofread carefully, particularly for accurate sentence demarcation and for tense confusion/inconsistency. Such errors impede, sometimes seriously, the overall sense of fluency and cohesion.
- Candidates must be aware of the need for clear paragraphing in their responses, including paragraphing for direct speech. A secure focus on structure is crucial since it helps the reader to feel that the candidate is in control of their writing.
- Candidates should be exposed to a wide variety of different text types, as outlined in the syllabus, so that they become familiar with the conventions of a variety of writing forms and purposes. They should be taught key features of those text types, to enable them to replicate these in their own writing.

## General comments

Many candidates self-penalised on the grounds of rubric infringement: some **Section B** responses were appreciably short of the minimum word limit and a few candidates did not answer **Question 1(b)** at all. Some candidates wrote well over 400 words for **Question 1(a)**, often at the expense of **Section B**, which was either short or of lower quality (possibly indicating that they had run out of time to check their work).

In responses to **Question 1(a)**, stronger responses focused clearly on the question, comprising effective story openings with a clear sense of drama and suspense. They met all requirements of the question and did not waste time on vague or repetitive information, instead including significant detail and development of

ideas. Weaker responses often began with lengthy, detailed accounts of morning routines before candidates seemed to run out of time to focus on the task and to create a sense of drama and suspense. Candidates should avoid lengthy preambles before addressing the task; the guidance of 'no more than 400 words' means candidates are being guided to provide a purposeful, succinct response.

The strongest responses to **Question 1(b)** maintained a close focus on linguistic and stylistic choices, with the relationship between these features being explained and explored successfully. They used relevant terminology consistently and confidently, using language precisely and appropriately. Weaker responses focused mostly, or entirely, on content and therefore only provided minimal analysis by indirectly outlining the structure of the piece.

Stronger responses on **Section B** generally had a strong sense of the appropriate form for the task; (description, review or email), a clear focus on the question and included appropriate stylistic conventions, as well as relevant content.

Weaker responses on **Section B** generally contained frequent errors or lacked focus on what the task required. For example, some responses to **Question 2** were mainly narrative rather than descriptive; some responses to **Question 3** were simple recounts of the content of the introduction day, with very little in the way of critique or personal opinion; and some **Question 4** responses were quite repetitive and list-like, lacking any sense of responding to a newspaper article.

### **Comments on specific questions**

#### ***Section A: Shorter writing and reflective commentary***

##### **Question 1**

Your teacher has asked you to write the opening of a story called *The Message*, about finding a piece of paper on your doorstep with a handwritten message on it.

(a) **Write the text for the opening of your story, using no more than 400 words. In your writing, create a sense of drama and suspense.**

While some candidates wrote complete stories and many lacked suspense and drama, some exceeded the word limit and others were underdeveloped, not making substantive use of the 400 words available. A few candidates chose to write the narrative from a third-person point of view. Many candidates wrote about a letter and a surprising number had the letters secured with a wax seal and the message written in blood.

Stronger story openings were well structured, with a focus on gradually creating drama and suspense through changes in mood. Creating a credible and viable setting was a feature of such stronger responses. The inside of houses and apartments were popular places for creating drama, with the outside representing a threat to the protagonist. Stronger responses focused on a shifting mood and atmosphere, gradually increasing tension. One candidate concentrated on sounds outside the protagonist's home; 'three gentle taps' on the front door with 'slow, quiet, scratchy sounds from upstairs' resulting in the character 'slowly opening the door'. Stronger responses paid attention to the 'handwritten message' by describing it clearly. In one response the candidate described the 'crooked, haunted looking letters and the 'cursive' writing. The note was carefully opened, increasing tension as the message was revealed. The brevity of messages often produced the most chilling effect: 'I can see you', 'I am waiting', 'See you later.'

One candidate received a message in a bottle delivered to his doorstep that he had thrown in the ocean many years previously when his mother was alive. This very thought-provoking piece on loss and grief began like this: 'I do not know exactly who returned the bottle, or how, or why they did, but I could not thank this person enough. The simple message has pulled me back from the darkest of days and brought me back to shore.'

Weaker responses often lacked in structure, frequently without any paragraph breaks at all. This affected coherence and the creative flow of the text. A common problem was inadequate or unclear punctuation, particularly the use of commas and inverted commas to indicate dialogue. There were also many instances of run-on sentences which required either a comma or coordinating conjunction to help the reader follow the main idea. There were also instances of one paragraph

being constructed with one extremely long sentence yet containing multiple ideas. Many responses contained quite a lot of tense shifting.

**(b) Write a reflective commentary on your text, explaining how your linguistic choices contribute to fulfilling the task set.**

This question was answered poorly by many candidates. One approach that worked well for some candidates was to use a Point, Evidence, Explanation format to analyse the form, structure and language of their responses to **Question 1(a)**. They named, one by one, the techniques used, giving precise evidence from their answer and explaining the effect on the audience. However, most responses were limited in detail and did not provide evidence from their **Question 1(a)** response in their commentaries.

Most stronger responses approached this question in one of two ways, each of which proved to be successful: addressing form and structure, going through the content of the story opening and then concentrating on language; or going through the text, simultaneously analysing all language devices. Stronger responses included a range of features, such as anaphora and hypophora, and discussed their usage confidently. They gave precise examples and attempted to analyse how the writer's stylistic choices related to audience and shaped meaning, for example: 'The tactile imagery of a "horrifying chill engulfing his body" and the frequent descriptions of sweat such as "beads of sweat dotted his face" add to the tension and suspense of the opening. Furthermore, metaphorically comparing the trees to "looming stalks of wood" causes the trees to appear threatening, and as a result causes the main character to appear to be surrounded by danger.'

Many of the best responses identified the linguistic choice made, gave a short example and then explained how the choice achieved an element of suspense or had a dramatic impact on the reader. For example, one candidate wrote: 'I used first-person pronouns to involve the reader by helping them feel the speaker's fear: "My eyes widened as I realized the red ink was not ink, but blood ...". This almost makes the reader widen their own eyes in shock.'

Weaker responses tended to summarise the content of the **Question 1(a)** response rather than focus on the techniques used to build suspense and drama. They tended to mention linguistic techniques without giving examples or explaining how these different techniques and elements helped to build suspense and drama. For example, a lot of candidates commented on the chronological order of events but did not expand on the effect of the order. Focus on the number or length of paragraphs rarely led to any meaningful analysis. Some candidates listed linguistic features they said they had used without any supporting evidence: 'I used similes, metaphors, personification and short sentences.'

Many responses lacked understanding of what an analysis of the writer's stylistic choices requires. Numerous candidates had clearly been taught a range of terms, for example pathos and onomatopoeia, and some were able to identify them in their responses to **Question 1(a)**. However, there was often little attempt to explain how a technique's use furthered the writer's purpose other than making vague assertions that it created drama and suspense or that it helped the reader to understand the character.

Plenty of candidates claimed that various literary devices had been used, but failed to quote from their writing to support such claims. Often, candidates mentioned that they had included rhetorical questions; however, candidates should understand that not all questions are rhetorical – in fact most of the questions they asked in their stories about who wrote the note and why were not rhetorical. Other responses were extremely short, sometimes under 100 words, and in some case the question was not attempted.

## **Section B: Extended writing**

### **Question 2 – Descriptive piece**

**Write a descriptive piece about a rubbish tip. In your writing, focus on colour, sound and movement to help your reader imagine the scene. Write between 600 and 900 words.**

Some candidates misinterpreted the question; responses from such candidates ranged from a waiter or beauty salon worker's measly reward for a service well done, to a false tip from a police informer in an

investigative raid, to others who identified a poorly-designed art tool as the rubbish tip. Description within such pieces was rewarded where it fulfilled the requirements of the question.

Stronger responses tended to be thoughtfully planned with the requirements of the task prioritised throughout. Some used original frameworks to create a cohesive image – such as following wild animals from the cold, quiet morning through a busy day and then returning to the quiet at sunset. There was also intentional focus on the three elements from the question – namely colour, sound and movement – to fully achieve the task set. The effective development of these elements using a higher level of vocabulary and complex, accurately constructed sentences is often what elevated responses to this question. For example, 'All individual noises, the clank, the screech, the crash, the shriek, became one amorphous body that dominated all else.' Stronger responses effectively employed descriptive techniques. Many used alliteration and onomatopoeia effectively as in, 'The machine cracked and crashed; the insects now buzzed in a feverish and foreboding manner.' Stronger responses featured effective use of linguistic techniques to create evocative and original imagery, such as: 'Like a dying candlelight, like a falling soldier, like a desperate soul in their last few moments, the blades of grass descend down, down, down into darkness.' Some focused on the workforce at the rubbish tip, as in this example: 'Workers stream through the front gate, some of them boasting vibrantly yellow hard-hats. The crunching of their heavy boots on the gravel becomes the music to their steady march.'

Weaker responses lacked planning and so were more superficial in their descriptions, often repeating images or descriptions of the same elements. The descriptions tended to use more common vocabulary such as 'very loud' and tended to rely on the same techniques, whereas stronger responses tended to be characterised by a wide variety of devices. Weaker responses often also lacked control over sentence construction, with frequent sentence fragments and comma splice errors throughout.

### Question 3 – Review

**You recently attended an introduction day at the school you are going to join next year. You decide to write a review of the introduction day, which you will post on your blog. Write between 600 and 900 words.**

Candidates were generally good at adjusting their register and tone appropriately for a blog entry of an introduction day; the degree of informality varied, only occasionally to an excessive degree that inhibited ambition and variety of expression in some cases. Candidates frequently organized their text in paragraphs focusing on different aspects of the orientation such as classrooms, cafeteria and presentations.

Stronger responses opened effectively, engaging the audience from the outset, as in this example, from a blog titled 'Colin's take': 'Hello my fellow opinionated friends! It's your favourite commentator, Colin! Yesterday I attended East Bridlington Prep's introduction day.' Other openings were equally engaging, although less chatty, such as this example: 'Introductions are scary things, often mired in mystery with no known conclusions, given the lack of familiarity between the subjects that are being introduced. Tall and imposing, with stone walls and a high spire, the Richmond Upper School casts quite the intimidating shadow in Hope's Peak, Montana.' Stronger reviews included variety, with appropriate register and tone, for example: 'Furthermore, the academic achievement and success in this school rival that of college education! With pass rates of above 90 per cent in each and every subject, Bob Junior High School boasts a whopping fifteen years of being undefeated in all educational competitions, including the spelling bee.'

A simple yet effective choice, and appropriate for a blog, was to structure the response with subheadings, which avoided the repetitive structure of: 'Next, we ...', 'And then we ...'. One example of incorporating headings, which took account of any emotions felt by students, included the following headings: 'On site nerves', 'Guided Tour', 'Feeling at home', 'Advice from me to you'. Within each section, the candidate provided selected, concise commentary with their own point of view.

Weaker responses tended to be comprised of a step-by-step log of the activities instead of a review of the experience of the day. Many weaker responses lacked suitable focus and included unhelpful accounts of getting ready to leave the house and getting to the venue, as in this example: 'I put my favorite outfit on and my favorite pair of shoes. I went downstairs and quickly ate my food because I did not want to miss the bus. My mom wished me good luck so I headed out the door.' They logged their activities in a chronological fashion, taking the audience through a tedious account of the day and friends they had made. Others catalogued a list of places visited without offering critical opinion, often neglecting to clearly address the audience. Some weaker responses also lacked in development of ideas, often without paragraph breaks and falling well short of the minimum requirement of 600 words.



#### Question 4 – Email

**You have read a newspaper article which said that people should go to shops instead of buying online, otherwise more and more shops will close. You decide to write an email to the editor, in response to this article, giving your opinion. Write between 600 and 900 words.**

Writing to an editor requires a quite formal register and not all candidates acknowledged this. Not all candidates focused fully on the scenario of the question. The focus of the question concerns the matter of shops being driven out of business by online sales; for many, it became a more general tribute to the merits of one over the other. Some treated it as a binary dilemma – ‘bricks and mortar’ shops (Mom and Pop), or online (Amazon). More fully developed responses included consideration of the social significance in shops, that they are public spaces which encourage, or are necessary for, a sense of community. There were some thoughtful suggestions.

Stronger responses demonstrated several key traits and skills in this task. They used proper email formatting, including a clear subject line, appropriate salutation, and a polite sign-off. They also started with an accurate summary of the article to demonstrate understanding and relevance: ‘Dear Editor, I recently came across the article in the Fletcher Post, titled “The Death of In-Person Retail”. This article struck a chord within me; this is an issue I am passionate on, and I wholeheartedly agree with every word written.’ Their writing was clear and concise, maintaining a focused argument without digression. They used a respectful and professional tone, even when disagreeing, offering constructive criticism aimed at meaningful dialogue. Such emails featured engaging openings and memorable closings that reinforced their main points. Opinions were supported with relevant evidence and examples, sometimes including personal experiences for added depth. These emails had a logical structure with a clear introduction, body, and conclusion, ensuring an easy-to-follow argument. Effective use of language, such as clear and persuasive techniques, improved the message. These candidates paid attention to detail, evident through careful proofreading and correct formatting. They acknowledged arguments to present a balanced perspective, and their authentic voice conveyed passion and conviction, making their emails engaging and credible.

One candidate cited the ‘threat of exclusion of outdoor activities if people choose to ignore in-person shopping. The question then is: “Why go out?”’ Another point of view centred around the idea that shopping in person was ‘an outdated model’, one ‘which is out of touch with the digital world’. Some candidates adopted the persona of a shop keeper, struggling to attract customers, and one who ‘is at the mercy of the Amazon giant’. Such responses were engaging and convincing.

Weaker responses were characterized by poor structure and a lack of recognition of the purpose and audience of the writing. Many candidates simply wrote an opinion piece about shopping in general or argued for the different ways in which people get their goods delivered. Some candidates focused only on in-person shopping or online shopping and were not discursive in style, which is within the rubric for writing your own opinion. However, this led to one-sided letters that did not give scope for development of the key points and ideas. One candidate wrote: ‘I have always ordered my shopping online and I do not see that changing anytime soon. If people do not know how to use the internet to shop that is their fault and if the shops do not go online maybe they deserve to close down.’

Weaker responses offered limited development on the topic, with minimal attempts at text organisation, often with no paragraphing and inaccurate sentence demarcation further affecting coherence. These candidates tended to use ‘facts’ and ‘experts’ to support their arguments (‘83 per cent of candidates aim to keep up with global current affairs’) or rhetorical questions to strengthen their position (‘How can we deprive leaders from satisfying their curiosity?’). At times, the tone was variable or confusing, for example: ‘Good morning New Weekly US. This morning I had a fresh hot coffee when I was reading your newsletter. I want you to keep doing what you do best and publish more articles about the matter.’

Weaker responses also lacked structure, with minimal paragraphing or long paragraphs that continued on a tangent without a clear point. Weaker responses also used an inappropriate tone which was rude or disrespectful towards the editor, such as: ‘Overall, I look forward to you editing this article with the author and thinking of some better arguments. If you do not, I will make sure that no one reads ANYTHING edited by you again.’

# LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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Paper 8695/12

Writing

## Key messages

- Candidates should manage their time carefully, allocating an equal amount of time for each section of the paper. Quite often the time spent on **Section A** seemed to have left candidates insufficient time to meet the required word count in **Section B** or to satisfactorily complete the task.
- Candidates must understand the importance of writing in clear, properly punctuated English, with accurate sentence demarcation, to perform well in this exam. Punctuation is a vital and essential aid to communication, especially as a guide to the structure of sentences, so it is imperative that candidates know and understand the basics of sentence construction if they are to succeed on this paper.
- Clear expression in simple and compound sentences with less variety is preferable to expression that does not flow, in long, rambling sentences. Some candidates lost control of grammar when they attempted to write in long, complex sentences. One error that occurred regularly was that of separating sentences with commas rather than full stops; another common error was writing in sentence fragments. Clear and accurate sentence demarcation is crucial, followed by the accurate use of a wider range of punctuation.
- Candidates should be aware that relevant content in the correct form is a key aspect of the overall assessment of responses for Question 1(a) and Section B tasks. To ensure that candidates understand the key requirements of each question, it may be helpful to underline key words within the question which indicate the specified form, content, audience and purpose of the tasks chosen. For example, in **Question 1(a)** the key instructions are to *write an email* and to *focus on the importance of reading about what is happening in other countries as well as your own*. In order to achieve the task (one of the Level 3 criteria on the mark scheme) these instructions must be followed.
- Candidates who have difficulty with tense selection should focus on writing in one tense, preferably either the present tense or the simple past.
- Candidates should be encouraged to proofread carefully, particularly for accurate sentence demarcation and for tense confusion/inconsistency. Such errors impede, sometimes seriously, the overall sense of fluency and cohesion.
- Candidates must be aware of the need for clear paragraphing in their responses, including paragraphing for direct speech. A secure focus on structure is crucial since it helps the reader to feel that the candidate is in control of their writing.
- Candidates should be exposed to a wide variety of different text types, as outlined in the syllabus, so that they become familiar with the conventions of a variety of writing forms and purposes. They should be taught key features of those text types, to enable them to replicate these in their own writing.

## General comments

Many candidates self-penalised on the grounds of rubric infringement: some **Section B** responses were appreciably short of the minimum word limit and a few candidates did not answer **Question 1(b)** at all. Some candidates wrote well over 400 words for **Question 1(a)**, often at the expense of **Section B**, which was either short or of lower quality (possibly indicating that they had run out of time to check their work).

In responses to **Question 1(a)**, stronger responses focused clearly on the question, comprising effective emails which usually clearly referenced the editor's article and the editor's viewpoints. They ensured a clear

structure and format, including a concise subject line, polite salutation, brief introduction, logically organized body, summarizing conclusion, and polite signature with their full name and credentials. Weaker responses were often disorganized, with points presented haphazardly, and did not provide a summarizing conclusion. They inadequately engaged with the original article, often failing to mention its title or publication date and providing a poor summary.

The strongest responses to **Question 1(b)** maintained a close focus on linguistic and stylistic choices, with the relationship between these features being explained and explored successfully. They used relevant terminology consistently and confidently, using language precisely and appropriately. Weaker responses focused mostly, or entirely, on content and therefore only provided minimal analysis by indirectly outlining the structure of the piece.

Stronger responses on **Section B** generally had a strong sense of the appropriate form for the task; (speech, review or description), a clear focus on the question and included appropriate stylistic conventions, as well as relevant content.

Weaker responses on **Section B** generally contained frequent errors or lacked focus on what the task required. For example, some responses to **Question 2** lacked any sense of being in speech form; some responses to **Question 3** were simple recounts of the content of the cookery book, with very little in the way of critique or personal opinion; and some **Question 4** responses were mainly narrative rather than descriptive.

### **Comments on specific questions**

#### ***Section A: Shorter writing and reflective commentary***

##### **Question 1**

**You recently read a newspaper article which said that people are only interested in news stories about their country. You decide to write an email to the editor, in response to this article, giving your opinion.**

**(a) Write the text for your email, using no more than 400 words. In your writing, focus on the importance of reading about what is happening in other countries as well as your own.**

Many candidates used the correct format of an email with a greeting and sign off; some offered fictitious email addresses and a subject line. The main idea in nearly all responses was that everyone should be interested in news from around the world. Many used some real-world examples from their own countries, such as disastrous local flooding, as well as from across the world.

In stronger responses, writers identified themselves and gave a reason for writing, such as in this example: 'I am Hosean and I make it my occupation to keep track of the state of world events.' They also made up fictitious quotations from the original article in order to refute the points made, for example: 'In your article, you say that "people are struggling in a rabbit hole of crisis on crisis". You suggest that the country is going through a political crisis, economic crisis, recession and other social problems so that all the nation would care about is their views and updates on Pakistan. I would disagree on that.' Stronger responses often analysed the article and then argued with it using vivid and intelligent examples: 'For example, what care can a shopkeeper in Zurich have of elections in the United States? He does not cater to the White House. He does, however, deal in American products. Political changes inevitably ripple economies and affect prices.'

There were some very sophisticated responses with candidates revealing a good knowledge of the importance of being aware of global issues: 'In a world where fast-paced globalisation and technological change is revolutionising the way we live, we have to acknowledge that countries are increasingly interdependent on each other both economically and politically.' They were able to develop their ideas to include the political situation worldwide and how that impacts their own country, tax policies, the local economy, new innovations in technology and the advancement in AI, natural disasters, ongoing conflicts and war. They expressed their ideas in a provocative and informed way. For example: 'After all, would not you agree that the world is a web, where every decision has a domino effect?'

Weaker responses suffered due to limited development on the topic with minimal attempts at text organisation, sometimes with no paragraphing and inaccurate sentence demarcation further affecting coherence. These candidates tended to use 'facts' and 'experts' to support their arguments ('83 per cent of students aim to keep up with global current affairs') or rhetorical questions to strengthen their position ('How can we deprive leaders from satisfying their curiosity?'). Their argumentation was weak, with vague opinions unsupported by evidence and lacking consideration for the facts. Some used overly emotional language, resulting in a flat tone.

Often, less successful responses were brief or list-like and struggled with accuracy; the clarity of the ideas suffered as a consequence, as in this example: 'I hope this email finds you well, I came across your newspaper article just a couple of days back, which talks about how people only pays attention in news stories about their own country without considering other countries.'

**(b) Write a reflective commentary on your text, explaining how your linguistic choices contribute to fulfilling the task set.**

One approach that worked well for some candidates was to use a Point, Evidence, Explanation format to analyse the form, structure and language of their responses to **Question 1(a)**. They named, one by one, the techniques used, giving precise evidence from their answer and explaining the effect on the audience. However, most responses were limited in detail and did not provide evidence from their **Question 1(a)** response in their commentaries.

Stronger responses were intentionally structured to address form, structure, and language clearly. These candidates explained the reasons for their choices with precise terminology and were able to show how they met the criteria of the task through their linguistic techniques. For example, 'lengthier sentence constructions allowed me to elaborate on key thoughts and details.' Stronger responses included use of persuasive techniques, such as rhetorical questions, analogies, and effectively appealing to the reader's emotions and values in their emails to the editor. They supported their reflective commentaries with relevant evidence and examples, and sometimes concluded with a thought-provoking statement or question that encouraged further reflection on the topic.

One successful candidate stated clearly what they were aiming for: 'I wanted to highlight to the Editor the importance of a diversified, well-versed nation. Firstly, I achieved this by mentioning stark global differences that hold the potential of creating an impassable divide by using a semantic field relating to such: "immigrants or natives, citizens or tourists". I aimed to imply the strong sense of empathy in the targeted reader.' The strongest responses maintained clear focus on the choices made and the techniques used, and were precise in articulating how these enabled them to fulfil the key aspects of the task, as in this example: 'The tone I chose to employ was polite, formal and persuasive, attempting to convince the reader of my point of view. In order to do this effectively, I first stated how I mostly agreed with them – almost everyone likes to be affirmed; it puts them at ease rather than on the defensive.'

Weaker responses were brief and vague, with a considerable number only being a few lines. They tended to regurgitate the main points from their emails without including any analysis. Often, these lacked any linguistic terminology and instead focused on the content. Many of these responses also failed to use accurate vocabulary or gave effects that were very general such as: 'I wrote this to emphasize the feeling the narrator felt.' Sometimes this simplistic attempt at analysis seemed to have little point, as in this example: 'The text has been written with a high frequency, containing words such as 'nations', 'problems', 'country', which can be easily understood.'

Some weaker responses were significantly impeded where candidates seemed to struggle to express ideas with clarity, as in this example: 'The text I have used in my email is very simple yet a lesson for the people who finds international news boring. I have tried to use some story that will actually effect on people's minds.' Such candidates often wrote very short answers or very general answers, listing lots of features but with no adequate analysis of their effects. Incorrect terminology was also common. There were also many examples of candidates merely paraphrasing their emails or focusing solely on structure with little or no attention to language. Other responses were extremely short, sometimes under 100 words, and in some cases the question was not attempted.

## Section B: Extended writing

### Question 2 – Speech

You are going to take part in a debate at school about whether it is a good or bad thing that lots of teenagers want to be famous. Your headteacher has asked you to open the debate by giving a speech on the topic. Write the text for your speech, discussing both points of view and giving your opinion. Write between 600 and 900 words.

Most candidates focused on social media as the easiest way for teenagers to achieve fame. Many candidates showed an acute awareness of the exploitative nature of some popular platforms. Candidates argued that influencers often engage in excessive attention seeking which can engender anxiety, depression and low self-esteem. In contrast, quite a few candidates mentioned Greta Thunberg as a positive example of using social media to achieve fame.

Stronger responses fully addressed the genre conventions of a debate, focusing on the positives and negatives. They focused on a range of elements of being famous and the role this can play in society. For example, one candidate focused on celebrities such as Taylor Swift giving to charity and food banks. They made less common lexical choices such as 'superb', 'ludicrous' and 'shambolic', and created an effective tone that engaged the reader, as in these two examples: 'That being said, fame is a two-sided coin. The other side, the much darker, gloomier, murkier side cannot be ignored'; 'Fifteen minutes of fame is all I need! Just fifteen minutes! Possibly something we've heard from many in our lifetime. The problem lies in the desperation, the shine in the eyes and drool in the tongue that people have at the mere thought of maybe being on television, of perhaps signing a few autographs and taking a few selfies, of thousands of people knowing who they are.'

Stronger responses were very clear in terms of purpose and audience. The style was clearly a speech, and the audience of peers was addressed at several points, not just at the start and end. One candidate posed the key question very simply to the audience and answered it briefly, for maximum audience involvement and to give the speaker a good opportunity to explore both sides of the argument: 'So, is it a good thing or bad thing to be famous? The simple answer is: it applies both ways.'

In contrast, weaker responses tended to focus only on either the 'good' or 'bad' aspects of wanting to be famous. Ideas were not developed well with relevant examples. The over-use of the rhetorical question was more distracting than useful, for example one candidate wrote: 'Do you think you should or should not be famous? Does it have drawbacks? Is there a new goal for me to achieve?' Weaker responses sometimes included several exclamation marks or excessive capitalisation in attempts to stress a point. Arguments were underdeveloped, with some vague points, insufficient evidence, and lack of consideration of opinions. Persuasive language and rhetorical devices were not used effectively, resulting in a lack of engagement and interest. Tone and style were sometimes inappropriate to the task, displaying uncertainty, monotony, and disrespect for opposing views. Finally, conclusions were weak, with no recap of main points, unclear positions, and abrupt endings without thought-provoking statements or calls to action.

Other weaker responses were impeded by frequent errors, which meant that the writing was not clear. For example, one candidate wrote: 'There are many teenagers out there, everywhere I believe, that would love to be famous, just think of it being famous comes with a lot of good advantages such as privilege to things such as, free stuff, money, prestigious power and love from people around you.'

### Question 3 – Review

The editor of a food magazine has asked readers to give recommendations for cookery books for beginners. You decide to write a review of a cookery book you have used, which will be published in the magazine. Write between 600 and 900 words.

The review form was generally understood by most candidates, with evaluative lexis being used to some extent by most. The large majority were positive reviews of cookery books, often written by a famous chef. There were some overly negative reviews, which sometimes became rather monotonous. Many candidates were aware that magazine writing can be lively and, up to a point, colloquial in addressing readers.

Stronger responses typically employed several effective strategies. They began with an engaging introduction that captured attention and clearly stated the review's purpose. For example, one candidate wrote: 'The relatively unknown book "Tastes from Home" is a step-by-step cooking guide including most homemade meals, as well as a sprinkle of international delights, which suit any culinary novice nicely.' They

established credibility and relatability by sharing personal experiences of using the cookery books. They provided detailed descriptions, highlighting key features, and provided an overview of recipes and techniques covered, while specific examples of helpful or impressive recipes improved the review. Humour and direct address to readers were particularly successfully used devices, as in this example: 'I found Sarah J. Cooper's book, creatively titled, "Burning the Chicken in the Kitchen", to be superb! You might assume this to be a book relating to witchcraft and have immediately imagined a bony pair of hands, stirring a large black cauldron with chicken feet sticking out from the vegetable stew but trust me, this book is so much more powerful than any sort of witchcraft you might have seen.'

Many stronger responses included headings for a clear structure. The writing was clear, concise, and engaging, maintaining the reader's interest. An encouraging and positive tone motivated beginners to try the recommended book. These reviews emphasized how the book build confidence in novice cooks. They concluded with a concise summary of main points, reiterated their recommendation, and encouraged readers to explore the book. For example: 'The cookery book also contains a specialised corner of recipes for baked items and drinks. This cookery book turned out to be a life changing book for me and "Hands Down" is one of the best cookbooks out there.'

Weaker reviews were often unconvincing, neglecting to detail the specifics of the book and suffering from obscurities at key moments in the text, such as in this example: 'It's incredibly detailed to its core and contains a dish range so vast it's bigger than the pacific ocean.' Some candidates started with fairly clear introductions that attempted to grab the attention of the reader and mainly stated the review's purpose. However, overly simplistic language resulted in a monotonous, unengaging tone. Many weaker responses consisted mainly of narration of the writer's experiences, detracting from the review form and usually lacking a strong awareness of audience. Many reviews were focused purely on the writer's experiences without attempting to genuinely contextualise these for readers or make them relatable, for example: 'By the help of this book I have won many interclass cooking competitions, and it has benefited me so much that now I could call myself an expert chef before even acquiring the cooking degree from my university.' Weaker responses sometimes tagged on a simple review comment at the end, such as 'I give it 4 stars', or wrote about a celebrity chef and what they have achieved, with little focus on the cookery book.

#### Question 4 – Descriptive piece

**Write a descriptive piece about an orchestra. In your writing, focus on sound, colour and movement to help your reader imagine the scene. Write between 600 and 900 words.**

Most candidates wrote descriptively quite consistently. Many candidates used a narrative frame in their responses to this question and this helped some candidates write more varied and interesting descriptive pieces. Many organised their description by following an orchestra's performance from beginning to end, usually starting with the hum of the audience, followed by the hushed auditorium as the lights dimmed, the curtains flinging or flying open, then the performance, which generally also included a singer or singers. A few weaker responses focussed more on description of the auditorium, curtains, stage and audience than the actual orchestra and their recital.

Stronger responses typically employed vivid imagery, using rich sensory details to create a visual scene. They described the specific sounds of different instruments, noting their tones, pitches, and rhythms, showing how these sounds were layered to form a complex auditory experience. Their visual descriptions were colourful, depicting the instruments, musicians, and stage lighting with vibrant language and using metaphors and similes to enhance imagery. For example, one candidate wrote: 'As I entered the auditorium, the mood shifted again; it felt as if there was only silence. Not a single utterance, only the tip tap of my shoes hitting the ground echoed through the hall.' Additionally, they created an atmosphere that captured the emotional essence of the performance, describing the emotions evoked by the music and the audience's reactions: 'Her voice sounded like an angel sent from the depths of heaven. She sang like no one else before. The vibrato in her voice granted everyone in her midst a blessing that night.' They captured the movements of the musicians and the conductor's dynamic gestures, conveying the flow and progression of the music. The strongest pieces had an engaging structure with a captivating introduction, smooth transitions, and a powerful conclusion that left a lasting impression.

One successful approach used by candidates, possibly based on personal experience, was to have a character seeing an orchestra for the first time, describing not just the music but the character's feelings. This approach worked well as an imaginative response. In one example, a young girl grudgingly accompanied her parents to a performance only to be fascinated by what she saw and heard from the 'wedding-like dresses of the women dripping in gold' to the 'harpist as she strummed the large instrument, breathing life into its strings'. The girl was fascinated by 'the conductor with his stick as a secret code'. As the

‘music rained down in an explosion of sound’ so too did the girl’s feelings ‘thrash around so I was disorientated’.

Weaker descriptions contained minimal imagery, relying on somewhat vague language that did not vividly paint a clear picture for the reader. Instead of showing the scene through detailed descriptions, they tended to tell what was happening, missing opportunities to engage the reader’s senses. For example, a candidate wrote: ‘My mom had booked me and her tickets to see Avanti Lui, the conductor and his band’. Control of sense and sentence demarcation were the most common indicators of a lack of control seen in weaker responses. They often evidenced ambitious ideas, but were brought down by mistakes in grammar, especially tenses, incorrect word use and frequent minor sentences, such as in this example: ‘The swishing whispers of Dior lips caressing the pearl collars of men with eagerness so palpating they gulp and guzzle alcohol that was corked, popped, shaken but not stirred, all begging to be guzzled by a lust drunk man. A night at the orchestra.’

# LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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Paper 8695/13

Writing

## Key messages

- Candidates should manage their time carefully, allocating an equal amount of time for each section of the paper. Quite often the time spent on **Section A** seemed to have left candidates insufficient time to meet the required word count in **Section B** or to satisfactorily complete the task.
- Candidates must understand the importance of writing in clear, properly punctuated English, with accurate sentence demarcation, to perform well in this exam. Punctuation is a vital and essential aid to communication, especially as a guide to the structure of sentences, so it is imperative that candidates know and understand the basics of sentence construction if they are to succeed on this paper.
- Clear expression in simple and compound sentences with less variety is preferable to expression that does not flow, in long, rambling sentences. Some candidates lost control of grammar when they attempted to write in long, complex sentences. One error that occurred regularly was that of separating sentences with commas rather than full stops; another common error was writing in sentence fragments. Clear and accurate sentence demarcation is crucial, followed by the accurate use of a wider range of punctuation.
- Candidates should be aware that relevant content in the correct form is a key aspect of the overall assessment of responses for Question 1(a) and Section B tasks. To ensure that candidates understand the key requirements of each question, it may be helpful to underline key words within the question which indicate the specified form, content, audience and purpose of the tasks chosen. For example, in **Question 1(a)** the key instructions are to write a **speech** and to **introduce both points of view** and **create a sense of interest** in the debate. In order to achieve the task these instructions must be followed.
- Candidates who have difficulty with tense selection should focus on writing in one tense, preferably either the present tense or the simple past.
- Candidates should be encouraged to proofread carefully, particularly for accurate sentence demarcation and for tense confusion/inconsistency. Such errors impede, sometimes seriously, the overall sense of fluency and cohesion.
- Candidates must be aware of the need for clear paragraphing in their responses, including paragraphing for direct speech. A secure focus on structure is crucial since it helps the reader to feel that the candidate is in control of their writing.
- Candidates should be exposed to a wide variety of different text types, as outlined in the syllabus, so that they become familiar with the conventions of a variety of writing forms and purposes. They should be taught key features of those text types, to enable them to replicate these in their own writing.

## General comments

Many candidates self-penalised on the grounds of rubric infringement: some **Section B** responses were appreciably short of the minimum word limit and a few candidates did not answer **Question 1(b)** at all. Some candidates wrote well over 400 words for **Question 1(a)**, often at the expense of **Section B**, which was either short or of lower quality (possibly indicating that they had run out of time to check their work).

In responses to **Question 1(a)**, stronger responses focused clearly on the question by making the purpose of the speech clear from the outset, engaged their peer group audience and introduced both sides of the

debate utilising a clear structure and format. Weaker responses were unclear in terms of the purpose of the speech or to whom it was addressed, and tended to focus on only one side of the debate. Ideas were disorganised and often lacked any paragraphing.

The strongest responses to **Question 1(b)** maintained a close focus on linguistic and stylistic choices, with the relationship between these features being explained and explored successfully. They used relevant terminology consistently and confidently, using language precisely and appropriately. Weaker responses focused mostly, or entirely, on content and therefore only provided minimal analysis by indirectly outlining the structure of the piece.

Stronger responses on **Section B** generally had a strong sense of the appropriate form for the task (magazine article, review or story), a clear focus on the question and included appropriate stylistic conventions, as well as relevant content.

Weaker responses on **Section B** generally contained frequent errors or lacked focus on what the task required. For example, some responses to **Question 2** lacked the engagement expected in a school magazine article; some responses to **Question 3** were simple recounts of the content of the exercise class, with very little in the way of critique or personal opinion; and some **Question 4** responses lacked any sense of drama or suspense.

### **Comments on specific questions**

#### ***Section A: Shorter writing and reflective commentary***

**You are going to take part in a debate at school about whether a student going to university should choose a subject that they enjoy, or a subject that will lead to a good job. Your headteacher has asked you to open the debate by giving a short speech on the topic.**

**(a) Write the text for your speech, using no more than 400 words. In your writing, introduce both points of view and create a sense of interest in the debate.**

Many candidates interpreted the question well, managing to structure their texts so that both sides of the debate were addressed. The conventions of a speech were understood by most candidates and most greeted their audience at the start of their speeches. As the task was to open the debate, some candidates set the scene by stating how this was an important moment in terms of everyone's future, therefore the issues would be presented fairly.

Stronger responses were succinct, focused and introduced both points of view. They offered a range of reasons for attending university for enjoyment and then countered this with reasons for studying more traditional work-centred courses such as business, medicine and law. They then came down firmly on one side or the other and invited the debaters to make their own arguments, for example: 'It has been proven by countless studies that people who follow their passions at university end up in jobs they enjoy, having higher levels of income and life satisfaction overall.' Many successful candidates used fictitious studies to support their points and also used statistics to add a sense of authenticity: 'Alternatively, following your passion while paying exorbitant fees for the privilege, upwards of \$30 000 a year according to the Harvard Fiscal Institute, seems nonsensical when you will be repaying those debts, with interest, for many years to come.'

Stronger responses consistently used inclusive pronouns as they presented a variety of ideas for consideration; phrases such as 'our debate' and 'it will help you decide' added a sense of reassurance to the audience facing a difficult decision. An upbeat mood was generated through the response to help to create a sense of interest in the audience. This was achieved by incorporating positive language of freedom to reflect an exciting choice for the candidate as shown though phrases such as 'our wildest dream is before us.' Rhetorical questions featured prominently as a way of inspiring candidates to 'think big', as one candidate put it. Many argued how parental pressure can result in a wrong decision. Candidates explored the ideas of job security and jobs with a 'guaranteed future' rather than a 'dream job with no stable income'. Some candidates promoted the idea of choosing a subject which had a definite career path such as medicine or the sciences. Forward thinking and security were presented and explored in stronger responses.

Weaker responses sometimes did not address that the speech was the opening to a debate or introduce each side of the argument. Often, they focused only on justification of one side of the

debate, thereby producing a one-sided presentation. Also, the purpose of creating a sense of interest in the debate was neglected in most of the weaker responses. In weaker responses, candidates seemed to struggle to incorporate a range of ideas and many such responses were therefore extremely short. Many weaker responses simply introduced the two ideas as questions without any development. Other weaker responses contained frequent errors of all kinds, as in this example: 'Well obviously they should choose the subject they enjoy otherwise the student would be dreadful about going to work and hate it. They would also love their job a lot more than others they would also show a lot more improvement doing a job they enjoy than one they hate.'

**(b) Write a reflective commentary on your text, explaining how your linguistic choices contribute to fulfilling the task set.**

One approach that worked well for many candidates was to use a Point, Evidence, Explanation format to analyse the form, structure and language of their responses to **Question 1(a)**. They named, one by one, the techniques used, giving precise evidence from their speeches and explaining the effect on the audience. However, some responses were limited in detail and failed to provide evidence from their **Question 1(a)** response in their commentaries.

Stronger responses began by displaying a clear understanding of the task's requirements, clearly analysing how decisions in form, structure, and language aligned with the task's objectives. These candidates substantiated their insights with detailed examples drawn directly from their writing, providing contextual explanations that highlighted each example's relevance to the overall piece. For example, one candidate wrote: 'The opening of my speech addressed my peers directly, giving a sense of camaraderie and also authenticity to what I was about to say. "Good morning, fellow inmates – we are soon to be released into the wilds of university life so perhaps now is a good time to acknowledge those of our esteemed teachers who are joining us for today's debate" By including the staff in my greeting I made sure to appear respectful of the setting, while signalling to my audience that what I was about to say was really directed to them only.' Stronger responses skilfully connected writing choices to the intended audience, clarifying how writing strategies aimed to engage and resonate with readers effectively. In this example, the candidate has written about the use of punctuation: 'The use of exclamation marks connotes an expressive voice and shows that the speaker is communicating her enthusiasm directly to the audience, indicating her determination to study her passion at university.'

Weaker responses displayed a limited range of technical language and did not clearly explain the effect of using particular words and phrases. Often, they simply listed or summarized the content of the speech and made simplistic comments such as: 'I used exciting words to create anticipation.' These candidates often listed features they had used but did not explain how they helped to achieve the task. Some candidates said that they had used a metaphor and then, unnecessarily, went on to explain what a metaphor was. Weaker responses often labelled features but their comments lacked exemplification and were followed by very generic comments on effect, such as: 'I also used similes to make the audience know a particular feeling.' Some candidates referred to generic effects: 'I chose to keep a friendly and sort of understanding tone because my intention was not to stress or freak anyone out' but could not pinpoint linguistic methods that created the tone. There were also many examples of candidates merely paraphrasing their speeches or focusing solely on structure with little or nothing on language. Other responses were extremely short, sometimes under 100 words, and in some case the question was not even attempted.

## **Section B: Extended writing**

### **Question 2 – Magazine article**

**In class, you have been discussing whether foreign travel will become less popular because people can find out everything about other countries using the internet. You decide to write an article on the topic, which will be published in your school magazine. Write between 600 and 900 words.**

Most candidates wrote on a thoughtful range of ideas and usually included a passionate defence of real travel, with an interesting blend of anecdote and personal perspective; less successful candidates relied more on formulaic responses, wielding invented statistics, for example, to persuade the reader of the benefits of travel.

Stronger responses often included effective features of an article such as an eye-catching headline, informative or intriguing subtitles and an engaging opening, such as in this example: 'People adore new

experiences: the thrill of ziplining through 100-foot tall trees, the odours of wondrous cuisines, the bustling markets filled with exotic mementos and trinkets.' Such successful responses showed evidence of planning, with a clear structure to the articles. The audience of peers was addressed throughout, with some candidates referencing the discussion that had taken place in class and bringing up some of the points raised by other students. A humorous or faintly ironic tone was often employed with some success, as in this example: 'As students, we have grown up with this technology so we do not have the nostalgic memories of these dated machines that some of our teachers probably do.' Rhetorical questions were also used to introduce a point of view and then to develop on it by answering the question: 'Is there any reason to embark on some arduous foreign travelling adventure if we already possess the knowledge of what we will find when we get there?'

Many stronger responses mentioned, when explaining the advantages of actually visiting a foreign country, the idea of 'real life experiences', 'immersive exposure' and the interaction with people, food, smells or cultural experiences. The use of personal anecdotes also made for more convincing and authentic articles. More sophisticated arguments explored the subtleties of travel rather than just the sensory experience: 'It is about stepping out of our comfort zones, embracing the unknown and forging meaningful connections with people from different walks of life.'

Weaker responses tended to consist of very personal accounts of using the internet to look at happenings in other countries, or focused wholly on the writer's own experience of a foreign holiday, without really addressing the instruction to write a review. The purpose and audience were often unclear and structure was weak, leading to disorganized, rambling responses, such as in this example: 'My family go on foreign holidays a lot and we always like it because we stay in nice hotels and there is always a beach and all of us like surfing and you can not do that just using the internet.'

### Question 3 – Review

**You recently went to an exercise class that you have not been to before. You decide to write a review of the class, which you will post on your blog. Write between 600 and 900 words.**

Most candidates seemed quite confident in using a style that would be fitting for a blog, although this sometimes detracted from the purpose of the writing, which was to review the exercise class. Most candidates adopted an appropriate level of informality with a friendly greeting. Some weaker responses were more recounts of gym-class experiences than objective evaluations of the activity as required in a review. In such responses, various exercise classes were listed, even so far as stating days of the week and times.

Stronger responses showed clear evidence of planning, with a clear structure, often featuring headings and sub-headings. The audience of peers was usually addressed, with some candidates referencing their imagined previous blogs or commenting on their interest in fitness or improving their lifestyle. They used an appropriate semi-formal tone and often used humour to add a sense of authenticity, as in this example: 'Despite my misgivings about the somewhat disheveled appearance of the outside of the building, I continued on to the reception area. There I was greeted by "Linda" (real name changed) who appeared already bored with her job even though it was only 8:15 in the morning! On asking for the location of the new exercise class, "Linda" looked me up and down and said, "Yes, you really need it". I was shocked and appalled and almost walked out there and then!'

The best reviews were evaluative and created through a confident authorial voice and persona. Many responses were either positive or negative but the best evaluated the positive and negative aspects before making a recommendation. Stronger responses evaluated the physical environment, the trainers, the equipment and the exercise routines offered. Some interesting responses gave insight to the exercise done in class as well as the side effect of the movement on the body at a later time: 'Instantly energized, my friend and I cycled to the beat of the music, slowing down and speeding up at the loud instructor's command. He expertly changed the tempos of the songs and our cycles, pushing us to pedal at speeds we'd never even tried before. The day after my time on the cycle, I was sorcer than I've ever been in my life. I got to feel just how hard I worked and how many calories I burned from just one session.'

Weaker responses often consisted of unstructured personal accounts of a gym experience with little sense of audience or of review writing. They often listed the facilities in the gym, or the exercises undertaken in the class, without evaluating them: 'We started with simple stretches while talking to the group. Stretches like touching your toes, high knees, arm pulls, arm circles, butterflies etc.' Others focused on the cleanliness of the place without really expanding on why it was an advantage or how it added value to the experience overall: 'For any hygiene freaks this class is for you. Instructors heavily advise to clean off sweat off of equipment. And there are towels to use.'



#### Question 4 – Story

**Write a story which begins with the following sentence: *After slowly opening my eyes, I realised that I did not recognise anything around me.* In your writing, create a sense of drama and suspense. Write between 600 and 900 words.**

This produced many narratives of kidnap victims, hospital confinement and amnesia attacks, along with a range of imaginative responses such as protagonists waking up in fantastical surroundings like old castles or even on alien worlds. There was a clear story structure across most responses and most candidates attempted a range of descriptive language, with varying levels of success.

Stronger responses were well planned and structured with a wide range of descriptive language. The stories continued seamlessly from the opening line that was given in the prompt and created suspense and drama by focusing on what was happening in the present rather than trying to explain how the narrator had got there, for example: 'I began to try to remember how I had ended up here, but it was a lost cause. However much I searched in the blank recesses of my mind, I could recall nothing prior to waking up in this strange, wilderness.' Some candidates described the central character's sense of puzzlement and wonder as they faced strange surroundings. One candidate focused on the character's physical state as they 'tested to see if I could move my legs. My body felt on fire; my tongue was dry.'

Other stronger responses included convincing, well-crafted endings that successfully resolved the drama: 'I often wished that my experience in the asylum had indeed been a dream, but of course, I was to end up back there many times in my life, and every time I would wake to the same familiar dread of not knowing who or where I was. This was to be my life now and evermore.' Some exceptional candidates made use of a circular narrative structure which began and ended with the given opening. Sometimes stronger responses employed a range of tenses very successfully to create a believable narration while skipping confidently through time shifts.

Weaker responses moved away from the first line given in the prompt almost immediately, often changing to present tense in the very next line. There was often little sense of suspense or drama because the candidate did not appear to have planned the response so there was a lack of control in the structure and expression. Many candidates wrote about waking up in a hospital and then began a long recount of the hours, days or even weeks leading up to the accident or event that had landed them in the hospital. They included dialogue that was often contrived and usually incorrectly punctuated. Sometimes candidates described a long series of attempts to escape, which became tedious rather than creating suspense. The ending of the story presented particular problems and candidates often ended by stating that it had all been a dream or that they realized they were actually dead. The frequent description of kidnappings often ended in something of an anti-climax, such as in this ending: 'I asked the man if he would let me leave and surprisingly he did. After that I was free and I never seen him again.'

# LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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**Paper 8695/21**  
**Drama, Poetry and Prose**

## **Key messages**

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

## **General comments**

The general standard this session was once again satisfactory with candidates achieving marks in the highest levels on nearly every text on the paper. Rubric errors were rare, occurring most often because the learner had attempted more than the stipulated two questions. A few learners did appear to have time problems, so that the second essay was either rushed or incomplete. The vast majority of learners followed the rubric accurately and with a clear balance between the two answers. All but a few candidates were able to show at least a basic knowledge of their chosen texts and many learners showed evidence of a real engagement with them.

There are two general issues to address this session:

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

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

## **Comments on specific questions**

### **Section A: Drama**

#### **Question 1**

##### **ERROL JOHN: *Moon on a Rainbow Shawl***

**(a)** This was a minority choice in this session. Nearly every response selected relevant material from the text with which to address the task. Weaker answers often summarised the work of each

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

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

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

## Question 2

### WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Measure for Measure*

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

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

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

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

### Question 3

#### JOHN WEBSTER: *The Duchess of Malfi*

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

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

#### Question 4

##### TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

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

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

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

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

## Section B: Poetry

### Question 5

#### MAYA ANGELOU: *And Still I Rise*

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

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

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

## Question 6

### **SIMON ARMITAGE: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight***

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

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

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

### Question 7

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

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

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

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

### Question 8

#### ***Songs of Ourselves, Volume 2***

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

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

such poetic choices were fully analysed and discussed in the context of an overall interpretation of Kipling's presentation of nature, the answers did very well.

### Section C: Prose

#### Question 9

##### **KIRAN DESAI: *The Inheritance of Loss***

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

#### Question 10

##### **IAN McEWAN: *Atonement***

(a) This was the second most popular question in the prose section. Nearly every response was able to select relevant material with which to address the task, though in some weaker answers the focus remained with characters, who were, to a lesser or greater extent, involved with medicine. For example, 'Robbie's desire to become a doctor is a symbol of his upward mobility', as one suggested, which was not developed into directly addressing the given task. Better answers at this level were able to retell some of the events in the hospital involving Briony and Cecilia, often in accurate detail. Responses with more understanding explored how McEwan uses their experiences as methods of characterisation, with some learners seeing 'Briony's horrible experiences, which she volunteers for, are a means of her trying to atone for the wrong she did Robbie', as one learner put it. More competent answers understood how McEwan presents the hospital environment through these experiences and how the 'reader's response to war is shaped by the horrors that characters we have followed, like Briony, have to experience', as one essay suggested. Good answers often analysed McEwan's style, with some perceptive explorations of language and tone. Other learners noted the effects of the narrative voice and how 'Briony's experience of the hospital becomes the reader's.' Very good answers developed such ideas with some consideration of the metanarrative and the effects of Briony's revelations about the narrative voices and the structure of the novel more generally. At this level of performance, learners were precise in selecting relevant quotations to develop their arguments and often were able to integrate contextual points seamlessly.

(b) This was the most popular question in the prose section. Nearly every learner recognised the context at least in general terms, 'coming as it does after Briony sees Robbie and Cecilia in the library but before her accusation of him as Lola's rapist', as one usefully summarised it. Basic responses concentrated on the characters, with some awareness of the various tensions between them, most often Briony's 'hostile attitude to Robbie, who in turn is lost in his newfound love affair with Cecilia', as one summarised it. Other basic responses recounted the background to these relationships, sometimes in too much detail, with a loss of focus on the passage. Better answers at this level were aware of the other tensions at play – Marshall and Lola and her relationship with her brothers, and Emily's failures as a host and as a mother, for example. More competent answers considered McEwan's presentation closely, his use of dialogue and 'how he suggests tone by subtle use of language and description, such as Marshall leaning back in his chair and directly addressing Lola', as one learner suggested. Others noted the change of narrative focus – Robbie wondering about Marshall's silence was seen as important by some learners as was the 'idea of Lola as a victim and the aggressive language in which it is described', as another learner remarked. Good answers explored the 'shifting narrative voice and structure' and how the interplay of each character's internal concerns was crucial to the development of the novel's plot', as one learner pointed out. There were only a few learners who were fully confident in analysing McEwan's prose style, though one essay did explore the shifting emotions of Robbie in the final paragraph very effectively, 'as his crucial question to Marshall is lost in the commotion of the table, which he uses to hide his interaction with Cecilia'. Very good answers were able to connect specific moments in the passage to the wider text perceptively – Marshall's 'rescuing of Lola which leads directly to the rape, because of the violence of her brothers which leads to them absconding and all the aftermath of that', as one learner noted.

#### Question 11

##### ***Stories of Ourselves, Volume 1***

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

(b) There were only a few responses seen on this question, with nearly every learner having at least a basic knowledge of the story as a whole and therefore some understanding of Ella's situation. Weak answers retold the rest of the story, leading up to Royal's death and were often aware of the significance of the Holden and its driver. Better answers were able to deconstruct her shifting moods as 'she coped with loss and loneliness', as one learner put it. Answers became competent as they considered some of White's methods, particularly language choices and use of symbols with the car, the garden and the teeth all discussed appropriately by some learners. Good responses were confident in analysing the narrative structure, as 'White lets us follow Ella's changing situation and the way she is clinging onto the past, even as the future in the shape of her garden and the Holden becomes significant', as one learner suggested. There were only a few good responses, with all of them having a secure knowledge of the story and some insight into White's 'concerns as he explores the depressing existence of the poor and lonely in rural Australia', as one noted.

### Question 12

#### MARK TWAIN: *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

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

(b) There were very few responses seen to this question. Weaker answers summarised Huck's story with only occasional references to the given passage. Better answers were generally aware of the significance of this passage to the wider text and were able to explore 'Huck's attitudes to education and being civilised', though for some he was 'evidently not comfortable in Miss Watson's control', which would lead to him 'running away and living on the raft', as one learner put it. More competent answers considered how Twain uses the incidents here to 'develop the reader's understanding of Huck's situation', with the 'different influences of society and upbringing making him somehow vulnerable', as one essay suggested. Good answers explored how Twain creates conflict here, both within Huck's mind and externally, with the threat of the tracks and therefore Pap, significant to 'his chances of actually escaping his poverty and abusive childhood', as one essay noted. Good answers were confident moving between the passage and the wider text, though very few were confident in analysing Twain's prose style beyond mentioning the first-person narrator and some elements of the language.

# LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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**Paper 8695/22**  
**Drama, Poetry and Prose**

## **Key messages**

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

## **General comments**

The general standard this session was once again satisfactory with candidates achieving marks in the highest levels on nearly every text on the paper. Rubric errors were rare, occurring most often because the learner had attempted more than the stipulated two questions. A few learners did appear to have time problems, so that the second essay was either rushed or incomplete. The vast majority of learners followed the rubric accurately and with a clear balance between the two answers. All but a few candidates were able to show at least a basic knowledge of their chosen texts and many learners showed evidence of a real engagement with them.

There are two general issues to address this session:

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

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

## **Comments on specific questions**

### **Section A: Drama**

#### **Question 1**

##### **ERROL JOHN: *Moon on a Rainbow Shawl***

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

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

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

## Question 2

### WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Measure for Measure*

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

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

(b) All but a very few responses offered relevant discussions about the Duke. Weaker answers summarised his role in the play generally, showing detailed knowledge of his actions and his

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

### Question 3

#### JOHN WEBSTER: *The Duchess of Malfi*

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

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

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

#### Question 4

##### TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

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

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

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

## Section B: Poetry

### Question 5

#### MAYA ANGELOU: *And Still I Rise*

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

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

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

### Question 6

#### SIMON ARMITAGE: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

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

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

(b) Nearly every learner was able to place this passage in its appropriate context, after Sir Gawain has paid his debt to the Green Knight. Weaker answers spent too much time in setting out the

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

### Question 7

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

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

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

(b) This was a much more popular choice on this text. Very weak answers appeared to be responding to an unseen, unaware of the companion poem in *Songs of Innocence* and struggling to develop an appreciation of Blake's concerns. Basic answers often summarised the poem and talked generally about religion, schools and the industrial revolution, without linking the ideas to specific parts of this poem. Other answers at this level offered a line-by-line paraphrase, though were unable to develop an argument about the nurse, beyond generalisations. More competent answers were aware of the companion poem and were able to discuss in what ways this nurse is 'typical of what happens with experience – we lose our youthful enjoyment of life's simplicity', as one learner suggested. Sound answers also considered Blake's poetic methods; language and imagery were often discussed with some learners alive to 'the effect of the poem looking like a nursery rhyme, with its simple structure and rhyme scheme.' For others this was 'ironic given the negative attitudes of the evidently disappointed nurse', as one learner suggested. Good answers linked this poem not only to the companion poem but also to Blake's 'attitudes to childhood and education', with some seeing the 'negative effects of experience as inevitable'. Others looked closely at the effects of the choices with, for example, many responses analysing her face turning 'green' and exploring the symbolism of spring/day and winter/night. Few learners were confident in analysing the idea of 'disguise', though some suggested it was how 'the nurse has to hide her true self', though from what or whom

was not considered. At this level, contextual points, whether textual or more widely drawn, were specific and often illuminated the learner's argument appropriately.

### Question 8

#### ***Songs of Ourselves, Volume 2***

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

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

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

## Section C: Prose

### Question 9

#### **KIRAN DESAI: *The Inheritance of Loss***

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

### Question 10

#### **IAN McEWAN: *Atonement***

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

### Question 11

#### ***Stories of Ourselves, Volume 1***

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

(b) This was a minority choice of question on the paper though the most popular one on the prose. Nearly all of the learners had at least a basic knowledge and understanding and therefore were able to consider the presentation of the woman and her son in the context of the whole story. Some learners did not recognise the passage as the story's ending and therefore limited the success of their interpretation. Better answers were able to explore the pathos of her 'pining her heart away' and the 'tear in the eye' of her would-be lover. Competent answers contrasted Hardy's presentation of the 'hardness of the priest and the softness of the greengrocer', though very few responses were confident in considering Hardy's narrative style in detail. Good answers did consider his use of dialogue, noticing the 'effect of her internal musings as making her more sympathetic to the reader', while others noted that the son remains an 'external figure, whose emotional detachment from his mother's loneliness is exemplified by the language such as "sternly" and "churl" and "clown"'. Such responses were not fully analytical and had only an intermittent appreciation of the significance of this passage in terms of the overall effects of the story.

### Question 12

#### **MARK TWAIN: *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn***

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

# LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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**Paper 8695/23**  
**Drama, Poetry and Prose**

## **Key messages**

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

## **General comments**

The general standard this session was once again satisfactory with candidates achieving marks in the highest levels on nearly every text on the paper. Rubric errors were rare, occurring most often because the learner had attempted more than the stipulated two questions. A few learners did appear to have time problems, so that the second essay was either rushed or incomplete. The vast majority of learners followed the rubric accurately and with a clear balance between the two answers. All but a few candidates were able to show at least a basic knowledge of their chosen texts and many learners showed evidence of a real engagement with them.

There are two general issues to address this session:

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

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

## **Comments on specific questions**

### **Section A: Drama**

#### **Question 1**

##### **ERROL JOHN: *Moon on a Rainbow Shawl***

This text was not a popular choice in this session.

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

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

## Question 2

### WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Measure for Measure*

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

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

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

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

### Question 3

#### JOHN WEBSTER: *The Duchess of Malfi*

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

### Question 4

#### TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

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

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

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

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

## Section B: Poetry

### Question 5

#### MAYA ANGELOU: *And Still I Rise*

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Question 6

### **SIMON ARMITAGE: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight***

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

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

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

## Question 7

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

This was the least popular poetry text on the paper.

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

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

### Question 8

#### ***Songs of Ourselves, Volume 2***

This was a popular choice of text, with all but a very few learners choosing the passage (b) option.

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

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

### Section C: Prose

#### Question 9

#### **KIRAN DESAI: *The Inheritance of Loss***

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

#### Question 10

#### **IAN McEWAN: *Atonement***

This was the most popular choice in the prose section, the majority choosing the passage (b) option.

(a) There were very few answers seen to this question. Nearly every response chose relevant material from the novel with which to address the task, understandably focusing on Cecelia and Robbie. Weaker answers summarised their relationship, with better answers at this level contrasting it, sometimes implicitly, with that between Paul Marshall and Lola. More competent answers moved beyond the characters and their stories by considering what they suggested about love specifically. Some learners saw them as 'different sides of lust and sexual desire rather than love, Marshall's rape contrasting Robbie's passionate, but ultimately destructive letter', as one learner noted. Most responses thought 'love was pretty much absent from all of the relationships', as one learner put it, though a few responses did consider other kinds of love 'Briony's love of writing and Leon's love of being in charge and important', as one noted, though these were summarised rather than analysed. Very few learners were confident in exploring McEwan's methods at all, with only occasional references to his narrative structures and 'use of confusing timelines and narrators so that the reader is not sure if anyone is in fact in love', as one learner argued. All of the responses would have been improved by a more detailed knowledge of the text which might have enabled supporting quotations to be analysed not just for their content but also for the writer's choices and their effects.

(b) There were only a few responses to this passage. Most of them recognised it as being from 'Briony's perspective when she was young, early in the novel', as one put it. Weaker answers summarised Briony's role in the wider novel, with only cursory attention paid to the passage. More basic answers recognised her 'obsession with writing', as one suggested and also how 'everything is about her rather than her writing'. More competent responses discussed the significance of this passage to the reader's response to Briony more generally, with some noting the 'gap between the child Briony and the writer Briony', as one put it. Good answers considered how McEwan created this ambiguity, looking closely at language. Other narrative methods, such as the use of dialogue at the end, the narrative structure and his use of voice were only considered by more successful responses. These were able to select telling narrative details – the references to Robbie for example and 'covering her sentence' – to support their arguments. Other better responses considered the effects of McEwan's language choices, how, for example, he 'suggested that Briony is in transition from a child to an adult', as one learner commented. Few responses were confident in analysing McEwan's prose style in detail, with nearly every answer focusing on Briony the character rather than Briony as a construct in a literary work.

### Question 11

#### ***Stories of Ourselves, Volume 1***

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

### Question 12

#### **MARK TWAIN: *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn***

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