LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

| 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 without much variety is preferable to expression that does not flow, in long, rambling sentences. Often, weaker candidates lose control of grammar when they attempt to write in long, complex sentences. One error that again 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. They should focus on answering each aspect of the task, ensuring that all content is relevant. Writing should be purposeful, without rambling or unnecessary filler content.
- To ensure that candidates do 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. In order to achieve the task (one of the Level 3 criteria on the mark scheme) the instructions must be followed.
- 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 who have difficulty with tense selection should focus on writing in one tense, preferably either the present tense or the simple past tense.
- 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 need to ensure that they provide evidence from their text to support points made in the **Question 1(b)** commentary. It is helpful to candidates to use a clear structure for this question, such as a PEA structure (Point, Evidence, Analysis).
- 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 full of errors, possibly indicating that they had run out of time to check their work.

Stronger responses to **Question 1(a)** focused clearly on the question, comprised effective emails written in an appropriately formal tone. These candidates gave a few clear reasons to support their opinion, often

referring to quotations from the original imagined article. Weaker responses often lacked an appropriate tone and relied on anecdotal evidence.

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, and 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; (review, story or speech), 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 simple recounts of the content of the TV series, with very little in the way of critique or personal opinion, some **Question 3** responses lacked any sense of drama or suspense, and some **Question 4** responses were not in an appropriate form for a speech.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Shorter writing and reflective commentary

Question 1

You recently read a newspaper article which said that the world would be a better place without mobile phones. 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, give reasons to support your opinion.**

Most candidates structured their writing clearly in paragraphs and demonstrated good awareness of the conventions of an email, using an appropriate tone. However, some candidates failed to adopt a suitable register, becoming overly emotional and sometimes verbally attacking the editor. The majority of candidates objected to the proposition entirely; however, a few agreed with the editor. Many candidates referred to personal experiences and effectively used emotional appeal to support their arguments. Some candidates took a balanced approach before favouring the continued use of mobile phones. There was a tendency by some candidates to confuse social media and mobile phones; these candidates somewhat digressed by discussing how the world would be a better place without social media instead of without mobile phones.

Stronger responses consistently addressed the appropriate audience, often beginning with clear and relevant greetings such as, 'Dear Editor, I have to wholeheartedly disagree.' They included features of an argument consistently throughout, giving clear reasons why mobile phones can be useful. They explored each reason in depth and complex lexical choices helped create a tone of credibility, with phrases like 'substantial impact', 'limiting the opportunities of our future generation' and 'capitalism and consumerism' demonstrating sophistication in language use.

Stronger responses were written in a respectful and professional tone, citing appropriate examples that reinforced the main points. For instance, one candidate wrote, 'On the contrary, many individuals earn a living solely through mobile phones. Influencers earn money using platforms like Instagram, Tik Tok and You Tube.' These candidates made sure to address all aspects of the question, balancing their opinion with some less common lexis, as well as a variety of rhetorical devices. Some candidates made effective use of figurative language to strengthen a point, such as the analogies in this example: 'Phones are as dangerous as knives. Without any training, they can be used to harm people, including the wielder.'

In their development, stronger responses addressed multiple points and elaborated on these with appropriate examples and language techniques. These candidates commonly used rhetorical questions, repetition, pathos, and relevant jargon related to mobile phones. For example: 'Do not you find it beautiful how we can share our opinions from across states, countries, oceans? You must agree that phones have interconnected the world's vast cultures.' Paragraphs were structured with specific purposes in mind, and sentence structures were employed to emphasise key ideas.

Many showed evidence of planning, which contributed to a coherent flow throughout the email. Most also wrote close to the 400-word limit, allowing sufficient space to fully develop their ideas and persuasively argue that mobile phones are not the root cause of societal issues. Additionally, candidates generally adhered to the email format, including address terms, body paragraphs, salutations, and signatures. For example, a considered final line was: 'I hope you will consider my humble opinions.' This demonstrated awareness of socio-pragmatic factors such as tone, directness, and formality appropriate to the audience and task.

Weaker responses were characterised by a poor awareness of audience and a lack of structure, as well as quite limited development of ideas. This all restricted the candidate's ability to fully meet the requirements of the question. These candidates typically wrote lists of reasons without sufficient elaboration, such as: 'Phones make life easier because we can call more people.' Their tense agreement was often insecure and inconsistent. They showed very little acknowledgement of audience or purpose, with examples like, 'Hi, I think cellphones are good.' Their viewpoints were frequently unclear or contradictory, for instance: 'I think mobiles should not be banned but also for some people they should be banned.' Sentence structures often contained errors such as missing punctuation and run-on sentences, which, along with numerous spelling mistakes, severely hindered communication.

Weaker responses tended to be subjective or emotional and attacked the editor without raising convincing arguments that justified their position on the article. These responses were sometimes very short, often only one paragraph, briefly outlining different ideas such as safety, education, GPS and using the internet, without exploring the subtleties and nuances around each idea. Some responses lacked respect for the audience, expressing outrage and/or shock at the opinions shared by the author of the newspaper article; at times, these were either too aggressive in their approach and language or far too casual in their tone and vocabulary.

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

Many responses lacked true analytical depth, with candidates frequently summarising or paraphrasing what they had written in **Question 1(a)** rather than analysing their choices. One approach that worked well for some candidates was to use a Point, Evidence, Analysis format to analyse form, structure and language. They named, one by one, the techniques used, providing precise evidence and explaining the effect on the audience. However, many responses were limited in detail and did not provide evidence from the **Question 1(a)** response.

Stronger responses clearly identified techniques and elaborated on the purpose behind each one. These candidates quoted specific examples from their **Question 1(a)** writing and explained how the techniques helped achieve a particular effect. One illustrative example is: 'To appeal to my purpose of explaining my reasons for my opinions, I used rhetorical devices like rhetorical questions ("Were you aware that...") paired with statistics ("72 per cent") to back up my ideas and to put the editor in my shoes. This was also done through anecdotes like "just yesterday" to display a sense of knowledge. A friendly tone is also made through exclamatory sentences and parenthesis ("and this was during a coastal sunset too!") which adds a sense of humour and interest.' This example demonstrates how the candidate not only named the techniques but also explained their objectives, which aligns with the expectations for language analysis.

References to logos, ethos and pathos were also very popular. For example, in reference to the impact removing phones would have on small business, one candidate wrote: 'I utilized rhetorical language, specifically pathos, to appeal to emotion and further persuade the audience. In paragraph 7, I write, "What kind of cruel person would want to take that away?" which attempts to make the reader feel guilty by painting them as a villain for holding their opinion.'

Weaker responses tended not to demonstrate any analysis of language, form or style. Instead, candidates often merely stated words or sentences they used without discussing techniques. For example, one candidate wrote, 'I have used the word disagree to show that I disagree.' Similarly, some candidates tended to quote long chunks of their own writing, such as, 'I wrote that "I always make sure to get the weekly paper at the end of each week." This statement shows that I've read the weekly paper for a long period of time.' Although this shows some attempt to explain, it does not constitute analysis of language, form or structure.

Another common tendency was to simply list the techniques used, with statements like, '*I have used this simile*' or '*This repetition has been used*' followed by examples quoted from their work. these candidates did not explain the purpose or effect of these techniques. For instance stating that repetition has been used without commenting on what it achieves is insufficient to demonstrate true analysis. As a result, such responses showed limited analysis. In weaker responses, points were often very vague, with no examples provided, for example: 'The devices I used to get my points across was similes and metaphors. I got my points across through a emotional perspective but also through a serious and intelligent way as well. Overall, I made myself direct with my opinions and even pulled out quoting from the article.' Other responses were extremely short, sometimes under 100 words, and in some cases the question was not attempted.

Section B: Extended writing

Question 2 – Review

You have been watching a new TV series about interior design. You decide to write a review of the series, which will be published in your school magazine. Write between 600 and 900 words.

Most candidates wrote positive reviews, offering opinions on format, presentation and some technical aspects of the series. Most chose to write in an informal register, suitable for a school magazine, and there was generally an awareness that this was a review and that there needed to be some balance expressed, along with a final verdict.

In stronger reviews, candidates engaged their audience from the outset, often making their opinion clear in the title. For example, one review opened with the arresting title, 'The House Healers UK – a bigger disaster than I thought possible.' This was followed by an opening sentence which immediately addressed the audience directly and engaged them: 'Art and design candidates, if you have not turned on BBC One at 5 pm on Thursdays recently, then I would STRONGLY advise you to keep on living in uninformed bliss.'

Stronger responses often included subheadings to focus clearly on areas for review. Some developed the imagined content in an interesting way, for example by including ideas like an 'AI generator' to produce a mock-up of what a room would look like. Additionally, some included a comments section, with associated email address, for readers to write into, thereby fulfilling form and stylistic aspects of real-world reviews of this type. Such candidates also used less common lexis appropriate to the semantic field of interior design, such as 'aesthetically' and 'complementary colour schemes'. Authenticity was created by creating a suitable title for the review, such as 'Dream Designers…Destiny's Designs: a show you must not miss!' There were examples of a convincing sense of reviewer voice which engaged the audience, such as in the following two examples: 'Interior Design for Dummies shows that moving out into your first home does not have to be tough – hence it's a five-star watch for me,' and 'Another aspect that deserves all the praise is the variety of homes that were decorated in the show. Inclusivity, in niche markets like interior design, is an aspect I love to see. The show's hosts Luka and Jackie offered expertise to a wide range of houses—from cramped one-bedroom houses to palatial state-of-the-art mansions.' Some candidates referred in detail to an imagined specific episode, enabling them to write in precise detail rather than in general terms

In weaker reviews, candidates often wrote lengthy narrative accounts of an episode from the series, without giving their evaluation and opinion of the show beyond the very basic, such as: 'The show is good and fun to watch.' Other weaker responses focused too heavily on technological elements at the expense of meaningful review about content, presentation and other relevant aspects of the series. Some candidates spent too long setting the scene, for example describing themselves as 'bored, on a rainy day, scrolling through Netflix for something to watch.' Whilst this could form part of a relevant introductory paragraph, this point was sometimes laboured and starting to stray into diary entry territory, forming too large a section of the task. Other weaker responses were overly negative, giving a low star rating without convincing reasons, while others were very short and in need of development. Many weaker responses also contained numerous grammatical and structural errors.

Question 3 – Story

Write a story called *No Turning Back*, about a person who leaves home one morning and decides never to return. In your writing, create a sense of drama and suspense. Write between 600 and 900 words.

Many stories centred around a teenager experiencing abuse, neglect, or emotional conflict, usually within a troubled home environment involving parents or stepparents. This theme was a common choice, and while it

offered opportunities for drama, the treatment of it varied significantly in quality. Whilst many candidates created or attempted to create drama and suspense, some candidates struggled to write consistently in one tense, resulting in a more muddled narrative. Most stories reached a satisfactory ending, even if it was necessarily looking forward to the unresolved future.

Stronger stories were written with more control and development. These responses were focused on characterisation and setting to enhance their narratives and to build the appropriate atmosphere. For example, one such response described three key places the narrator cycled past on their way out of town, each providing a bit more exposition and context as to why they were leaving, rather than stating it explicitly in the beginning. These candidates demonstrated their ability to use imagery and linguistic techniques to achieve drama and suspense more effectively, such as in: 'My home grieved for me, even though I was not yet gone. Maybe it already knew I was a ghost.' Additionally, showing the character's feelings and reactions rather than merely stating them made for a more engaging response: 'I walked through the empty halls once more. My footsteps echoed through the house like the ghosts that haunted graveyards, an odd sort of hollow grief that trails behind the race of time.'

Stronger stories were successful in building drama and suspense through a carefully crafted structure. One candidate used a ticking alarm clock as a structural device: 'The slow ticking of the clock was her only company. It was consistent, reliable; it never hesitated.' As the girl tried to escape, the ticking of the clock intensified: 'She wished the clock would stop counting for a moment. Time was running out.' The reason for the protagonist wishing to escape an unpleasant home environment was gradually revealed at various points through the narrative, thus maintaining the reader's interest. Another strong response was written from the perspective of a refugee fleeing Lithuania for the USA in WW2, effectively describing small details such as suitcases on the boat and the 'luminous glow of skyscrapers' on arrival at New York: 'The low toned boat horn exclaimed that our journey was over; joy was tinged with sadness knowing we were never going back.'

Some candidates used a time lapse structure and this was sometimes very effective as they made it into a circular narrative, looking back from the perspective of an older person who had made a new life in different place. Occasionally humour was used to good effect, with candidates assuming a sarcastic or world-weary tone and maintaining it consistently throughout the piece. Other candidates utilised pathetic fallacy to set an ominous tone from the outset, for example: 'Dawn breaks over the peaks of snow-capped mountains and the clouds hang heavy and dense in the sky. Dark and black and viscous, they gather; static electricity crackles bright and tense within the cavernous confines of rain-burdened clouds.'

Weaker responses tended to be poorly planned with limited narrative characteristics and more of a focus on a series of events with little development, some not entirely connected to the opening prompt. Weaker responses sometimes used the 'it was an ordinary day'' phrase within the first few lines, followed by a pedestrian listing of a morning routine in the first few lines as an attempt at exposition, rather than integrating the exposition into the action. Weaker responses often lacked originality or relied on clichés. These narratives typically included limited character development and predictable plotlines. They tended to lack descriptive detail and suspense-building techniques.

In these stories, candidates seemed unsure of how to develop their plots or build tension. Often, these responses consisted of just an opening or fragment rather than a full narrative. Grammatical weaknesses and poor sentence demarcation were common, especially in weaker scripts that combined multiple issues, including lack of cohesion, inaccurate punctuation, and inconsistent tenses. A typical example read: 'As Georgina is climbing out her window her hand slip from grapping her window from and cuts herself, she screamed. Her mother dashed through her bedroom door "What on earth are you doing Gina" her mum yells out. Georgina froze at the site of her mother and decided to climb back into her window.' These errors disrupted the reader's engagement and impeded meaning. Additionally, weaker responses frequently fell short of the required word count, resulting in limited character or plot development.

Verb tense control was a particular challenge, with many candidates shifting inconsistently between past and present. Examples such as 'she speak' or 'I was aware I am a guest' demonstrate a lack of mastery over basic grammatical structures. The recommendation for such candidates is to stick to a single, consistent verb tense (preferably past tense) to avoid confusion.

Question 4 – Speech

Your class has just had a discussion about the benefits of studying science subjects at school. Your teacher has asked you to give a speech to first-year candidates at your school, encouraging them to learn science subjects. Write the text for your speech, creating a sense of enthusiasm for science. Write between 600 and 900 words.

Most responses focused quite well on the benefits of learning science subjects and frequently linked this to employment opportunities. A summary of the contents of the speech was usually provided in the conclusion, often with a call to action and a valediction to close. Some candidates demonstrated a solid understanding of audience and purpose. Most used at least some features of speech, such as rhetorical questions, and maintained an appropriate tone and register, generally informal but not overly colloquial.

Stronger responses created a genuine connection with the reader, often by establishing a voice or persona. For instance, opening lines like, 'I remember when I was just starting here' and 'We are so lucky that we have the facilities that we do here' added warmth and relatability. These candidates used a range of persuasive techniques to engage their audience directly, for example: 'Even the greatest minds like Marie Curie and Einstein were once candidates just like you' and 'In Environmental Science you will learn how to make a real difference in this world rather than sitting by and ignoring the greater issues.' They also maintained a strong sense of voice, for example: 'Plus, who does not love messing around with chemicals like an evil scientist? Shh, do not tell the headmaster I said that!'

Better responses were imaginative and purposeful. They used extended metaphors and referenced global issues such as 'global conflict' and 'global warming', linking their ideas to wider societal contexts. They also demonstrated grammatical accuracy throughout, with correct spelling and punctuation. An example of a strong, structured greeting was: 'To our Head Teacher, and her Deputy, teachers and fellow students – good morning!' This set a respectful and formal tone suitable for the speech format. The purpose was also made clear early on, as shown by: 'I am speaking to you today about the importance of learning a variety of sciences for our development.'

These responses elaborated on various ideas, for example, how science helps us understand the world, how it can be enjoyable and surprising, and how it leads to diverse careers providing 'infinite paths to go down'. Candidates used effective transitions such as 'moreover', 'furthermore', 'additionally' and 'consequently' to provide flow between paragraphs and ideas. Such candidates enriched their arguments by quoting famous scientists and philosophers, adding credibility and depth to their responses. One candidate wrote: 'Famous philosophers such as Pythagoras and Socrates as well as geniuses like Da Vinci and Tesla […] icons of human history have improved the overall life of humanity due to their inventions and reasoning.' This was often followed by rhetorical questions used purposefully, rather than as a standalone device, such as: 'Why can not you be the next one to influence humanity?' Many concluded their speeches effectively, providing closure and acknowledging the audience. One candidate wrote a personalised motto that left a memorable impression – 'If you want to, you can!' – paired with a simple thank you to the audience for their attention.

In weaker responses, candidates often listed different areas of science without development. Their understanding of science often came across as superficial or stretched. There were some pedestrian responses merely listing and explaining the different sciences, for example: 'Biology is the study of life we learn about the intresting things we may or may not know how we see a specific color, how the water cycle works, cells of organism similarity or differences.' Some weaker responses relied on a rather mundane understanding of studying science, such as in this limited understanding of the anatomy of plants: 'You will understand how they grow which will make your garden flourish even more, and in case you go on a family camping you'll be able to point out the different parts, and tell them which ones they can not orcan eat.'

A significant number of responses contained insecure spelling, punctuation, and grammar. Many responses contained frequent errors of various kinds, for example: 'Our science instructares here make learning science corses easy and fun to understand, so that it is both engaging and comprehendible. You should always take advantage of new ofpertanities to learn what goes on in the earth, your body, in the wild, and so much more.' Such language issues hindered clarity and reduced the overall impact of the writing. Another recurring issue was repetition, often of the same points in different paragraphs with no added effect or purpose. These responses were also frequently under the required minimum word count.

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

> **Paper 8695/12**
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- 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 without much variety is preferable to expression that does not flow, in long, rambling sentences. Often, weaker candidates lose control of grammar when they attempt to write in long, complex sentences. One error that again 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. They should focus on answering each aspect of the task, ensuring that all content is relevant. Writing should be purposeful, without rambling or unnecessary filler content.
- To ensure that candidates do 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. In order to achieve the task (one of the Level 3 criteria on the mark scheme) the instructions must be followed.
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- 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 full of errors, possibly indicating that they had run out of time to check their work.

Stronger responses to **Question 1(a)** focused clearly on the question by making the purpose of the speech clear from the outset and comprised effective speeches which engaged their peer group audience and

introduced both sides of the debate. These candidates utilised a clear structure and format. Weaker responses were unclear in terms of the purpose of the speech or to whom it was addressed and they 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, and 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 (story, essay or review), 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 drama or suspense, some responses to **Question 3** read more like magazine articles than essays, and some **Question 4** responses were simple recounts of the content of the photography course with very little in the way of critique or personal opinion.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Shorter writing and reflective commentary

Question 1

You are going to take part in a debate at school about whether it is better to have one job for life, or to change careers one or more times. 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. Introduce both points of view and create a sense of interest in the debate.**

Many candidates demonstrated an understanding of the required format, showing awareness of audience and tone. Most candidates were able to generate some relevant arguments in response to the task. Common points in favour of staying in one job included long-term security and pension benefits, the opportunity to build deep expertise, and a strong sense of workplace community. In contrast, arguments supporting career changes often focused on developing broader skills, achieving higher earning potential, and adapting to a rapidly changing job market. Many candidates acknowledged the merits of both sides before clearly stating their own position. This helped to build momentum for the debate and allowed room for potential rebuttal.

Stronger responses usually began with a direct address and attempted to engage their audience early on, for example: 'Today, we have an interesting topic that has been debated for centuries: Is it better to have one job for life, or to change careers one or more times? Think hard here! Explore one land and call it your home or discover numerous corners and choose the best.' This type of introduction captured the spirit of the debate and set a clear direction for the speech. Another approach that created impact with a punchy opening was: 'Survive or thrive? What is it that you intend to do over the course of your working life?'

In stronger responses, candidates consistently used a range of language to create a compelling voice, which gave their speeches a personal and persuasive tone. For example, one candidate wrote: 'Nothing compares to the adrenaline of securing your first job. I remember when…'. Such responses were well-balanced, presenting both the benefits and drawbacks of long-term careers over switching jobs. They moved beyond simplistic ideas like money, status or family expectations, instead exploring deeper motivations and societal factors. Stronger responses were characterised by the inclusion of a variety of rhetorical devices, anecdotes and use of statistics. Stronger responses had an engaging, lively opening address, presenting an interesting hook rather than just rephrasing the question, such as in this example: 'Your life is a story. One with multiple chapters and pages that signify milestones and achievements. You make the choices. You hold the pen.'

Better responses were marked by their clarity, accuracy, and control of grammar and structure. Paragraphing was clear, with transitional phrases such as 'First, let us consider …' helping to guide listeners. Such candidates employed complex sentence structures effectively, as seen in this example: 'Or maybe they would not. Maybe, since they were a kid, they've dreamed of "making it big" – discovering something groundbreaking, creating endlessly, or just becoming really important – and really rich – in their field. A zeal that tells them what they're destined for.' These candidates demonstrated a well-developed thesis, maintained a logical flow, and concluded with clarity.

Weaker responses showed some awareness of audience, usually with a greeting, but many closed inappropriately and often lacked a clear opinion or argument. These candidates jumped from one idea to the next without an organising structure or cohesive thesis. Many began with excessive detail, particularly personal anecdotes about childhood dreams or family pressures, then ran out of time or space to complete the task meaningfully. Content was often simplistic, sticking to repetitive points about earning money or stability, for example, without further development.

Weaker responses were composed very simply and lacked a sense of interest, for example: 'When it comes to sticking through one job; it is extremely understandable. Choosing one major career and holding on to it has a good direction.' Grammar and sentence demarcation were significant weaknesses in many lower-level scripts. For example, one candidate wrote: 'But be careful while choosing this critical and decisive decision, there are some crucial points you have to think about and take in consideration, one of them being financial stability, my advice is searching up the yearly salary a average person.' This sentence illustrates multiple issues, including run-ons, incorrect idioms, article misuse, and awkward phrasing.

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

Many responses lacked true analytical depth, with candidates frequently summarising or paraphrasing what they had written in **Question 1(a)**, rather than analysing their choices. One approach that worked well for some candidates was to use a Point, Evidence, Analysis 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.

Stronger responses displayed candidates' ability to refer to specific stylistic features and explore their impact on meaning. For instance, one candidate wrote: 'I deploy the simile "Like a heart monitor" to create visualization of the changing careers.' Another wrote: 'Additionally, the metaphor "it could cripple you" demonstrates the negatives of one job for life.' These examples reflect an effort to identify language techniques and explain how they shape tone or contribute to argument.

Stronger responses effectively identified and explained specific linguistic features. For example, some discussed the use of rhetorical questions such as 'Have you ever wondered…?' to involve the audience, or inclusive pronouns like 'we' and 'us' to create a sense of shared experience. These candidates also commented on their use of a formal register and persuasive vocabulary. For example: 'The words "crucial" and "significant" add authority and emphasis.' Where relevant, some responses insightfully explored figurative language, such as metaphors depicting career change as a 'journey' or 'path,' and explained how these enhanced engagement and clarity.

They used relevant terminology consistently and confidently, using language precisely and appropriately. In this example, the analysis is detailed and focused: 'The simile "as risky as poker" suggests that switching careers is like playing poker which is generally considered a risky game. This further develops into an extended metaphor by using the words "royal flush" to describe the potential rewards as a royal flush is the highest value set in the game of poker.'

Such candidates demonstrated their ability to reflect on purposes, academic context and audience and how these factors shape style, tone and approach. They wrote about the spoken mode, politeness, debate protocol and rhetorical features. They traced the lexical patterns relating to both sides of the debate, often characterised by themes of stasis and change: 'trudging every day to the same place of work', 'doing the same thing day in day out can get repetitive and boring. It does not challenge you anymore', 'burnout' versus 'the fickle process of changing jobs and making countless applications' and 'As humans it's in our nature to want to explore and try new things.'

Weaker responses often summarised the content of the debate or made vague comments without providing examples, as in this case: 'The speech offers a new perspective on work troubles, with it being straightforward and simple. There is an avid use of connectors. Vocabulary is also simple and to the point as well as the use of paragraphs that distinguish the tackling of a different subject. I used simple words to make the speech more digestible.' Some candidates used written mode features to describe spoken mode features, for example referring to question marks rather than questions: 'This question mark helps to keep readers engaged throughout the text.' Other weaker responses tended to list a few basic features, mentioning devices like 'repetition' or 'pronouns', but with little or no attempt to explain how these were used or what effect they had on the reader. Frequently, these candidates listed words they had used without referencing the technical term or discussing its purpose. Many analyses were very short and were therefore insufficiently developed to demonstrate a sound understanding of form, structure, or language.

Section B: Extended writing

Question 2 – Story

Write a story which begins with the following sentence: *As I walked past the painting of the man, I was sure that his eyes were following me*. **In your writing, create a sense of drama and suspense. Write between 600 and 900 words.**

While some narratives demonstrated real creativity and linguistic flair, many fell short due to lack of planning, control and sustained development. More successful candidates tended to pick an appropriate location to fit with the prompt (museum, art gallery, mansion, antique shop) and then followed on their narrative from this point. A common technical fault was insecurity of tense throughout the piece: often, writing would move from the past to the present and back again frequently and in ways that did not suggest deliberate authorial intent.

In stronger responses, candidates demonstrated a clear ability to use language effectively to build atmosphere, tension, and imagery. They maintained focus on a single time frame, often a moment of confrontation with the painting, and shaped their narratives with intention and coherence. Tension was often created through sharp, controlled sentences such as, 'And there it was. I could never escape it.' These candidates made full use of descriptive and figurative language, bringing their stories to life through imagery like, 'Wave after wave of fear crashed throughout my body,' and 'the city retching heavily to rid itself of the panic we all felt.' Such vivid language added depth and mood. Stronger responses also displayed grammatical control, accuracy in spelling and punctuation, and a conscious use of structure to craft a complete and satisfying narrative. One strong example of descriptive control was: 'Deep in the school, past classrooms, lockers, and teacher's offices, lay a wide, open hall. Clumps of candidates hurried to grasp a glance, swarming the painting like bees swarming their hive.' Similarly, metaphors like 'my heart was an unruly drum' and expressions such as 'to soothe my beating heart' or 'I forced a staggering breath' reflected an elevated use of language to evoke emotion and develop tension.

Another way candidates successfully created tension was to establish a sense of ambiguity in the opening which stimulated reader engagement, for example: 'Though recently I did not know what to believe, who to trust. My life, once picture perfect, seemed to be spiralling out of control and all I could do was stand there and watch.' The use of analepsis was an effective device in this task, provided candidates were able to confidently master their tenses. Some candidates approached the task as the onlooker having some mental or psychological issue, creating a more intense sense of drama and suspense. This was then often revealed at the end. For example, 'There is no way a painting's eyes were following me. "Get it together", I mutter under my breath.'

One candidate wrote from the perspective of a security guard in an art gallery: 'From afar, there seemed nothing extraordinary about this man in a long brown trench coat, sneering at all the tourists that stood before him.' This candidate demonstrated a wide range of vocabulary and sentence structures, along with strong control over narrative organisation. Techniques such as internal monologue and sensory description were used effectively to create a growing sense of unease: 'I could feel a chill running down my spine as those eyes seemed to read my deepest, darkest thoughts.'

Weaker responses tended to be poorly planned, with limited narrative characteristics and more of a focus on a dramatic series of events with little development, some not entirely connected to the opening prompt. Weaker responses sometimes used the 'let's rewind a little' phrase within the first few lines but never returned to the prompt sentence, making for a fragmented response.

In weaker responses, candidates often struggled to use the prompt meaningfully. The painting was often treated as a throwaway detail rather than a central narrative device, as seen in the line, 'And I saw a painting with the eyes that followed me before I went back home.' These stories tended to lack planning, with seeming uncertainty over how to develop a plot or build tension. Often, these responses consisted of just an opening or fragment rather than a full narrative. Grammatical weaknesses and poor sentence demarcation were common, especially in scripts that combined multiple issues such as lack of cohesion, inaccurate punctuation and inconsistent tenses. A typical example read: 'I felt a shiver down my spine as a slowly turned around, I knew I wouldnt find anyone there… My hands wouldnt stop shakşng as I dailed the number.' These errors disrupted the reader's engagement and impeded meaning. Additionally, such candidates frequently failed to reach the required word count, resulting in limited character or plot development.

Verb tense control was a particular challenge, with many candidates shifting inconsistently between past and present. Examples such as 'she speak' or 'I was aware I am a guest' demonstrate a lack of mastery over basic grammatical structures. The recommendation for such candidates is to stick to a single, consistent verb tense (preferably past tense) to avoid confusion.

Question 3 – Essay

In class, you have been discussing whether it is better to spend your holidays in your home country, rather than travelling abroad. Your teacher has asked you to write an essay on the topic, giving your opinion. Write between 600 and 900 words.

Most candidates attempted to present both sides before offering an opinion. However, many responses lacked the formality required by the question and some were almost speech-like, including phrases like: 'Let's look at'. Other responses read more like magazine articles. Most candidates explored the topic to some degree but struggled to present a solid and well-reasoned opinion, as required by the task. In several cases, arguments presented were contradictory, which undermined the quality and coherence of the writing.

Stronger responses evidenced candidates' ability to present balanced arguments with clear examples, comparing cost, cultural experiences, and convenience. These responses used some cohesive devices and maintained a formal tone. For example: 'While holidays in your own country have their advantages like convenience and affordability, travelling abroad provides us with unique experiences that allow us to grow and connect with the wider world.' One environmentally conscious response evaluated the carbon emissions incurred in travel abroad, while another advocate of staying at home, keenly aware of diversity, suggested: 'Do not go to another gargantuan metropolis from whence you came, go to the interiors that may yet be untouched by rampant homogenous development.'

Stronger work was structured logically through the use of discourse markers such as 'On the other hand', 'furthermore' and 'it is not always as simple as that' to clearly link and contrast points. These candidates also used a range of language to craft a persuasive and reflective tone, with well-developed ideas that went beyond surface-level reasoning. One wrote: 'I could take out the latest holiday brochure and spend all of my allowance, or we could look closer to home and experience our own culture.' Such candidates also used this task to showcase their descriptive ability combined with the warmth of personal voice, for example: 'Best of all, travelling takes you to the most exquisite palate of incredibly sumptuous foods from all cultures – what one would not do for just one soft, fruity scoop of Italian gelato?'

Weaker responses often displayed misunderstanding of the task. These candidates sometimes launched straight into the task with a minimum of planning. For instance, one candidate began by writing: 'Holidays are favourite time for students and teachers. Since they are quite short, most of the people prefer to spend them abroad to make holidays unforgettable and probably one of the most engaging. Also it's too inconvenience.' Many produced narrative-style accounts instead of argumentative essays, for example: 'The day had come. I was finally boarding the plane.' Others simply listed reasons to go on holiday, without providing commentary or forming a viewpoint. Their pieces lacked development, with limited or no attempt to weigh perspectives or express a clear opinion. Instead, they relied on vague or repetitive points such as staying at home being cheaper. One response read: 'The question has too many answers but at different individuals with different thinking of life. If there are friends we can enjoy movie nights or pot locks, despite Its of no use.' Such errors in sentence construction, grammar, and spelling were frequent, often impeding meaning. These responses showed little awareness of structure or form, and the writing lacked the clarity and cohesion necessary for higher-level achievement.

Question 4 – Review

Last weekend, you did a one-day photography course for beginners. You decide to write a review of this course, which will be published on a photography website. Write between 600 and 900 words.

The review form was generally understood by most candidates, with most using evaluative lexis to some extent. The large majority were positive reviews of the photography course and there were some overly negative reviews, which sometimes became rather monotonous. Balanced arguments were raised – on what went well during the course and what did not go well – with a few providing suggestions for improvement.

Stronger reviews were balanced and had an element of credibility. There was some use of specialist language and field-specific lexis such as 'lighting/camera angle/shot' that would be appropriate for the review. Their use of headings, summaries, and final ratings strengthened the clarity and readability of their reviews. They also used conventions of the genre such as informal but informative language, subheadings, personal anecdotes, and ratings. For example, some candidates established their motivation for doing the course: 'As an avid traveller, I am always looking to capture beautiful moments in nature, but I fail to.' They evaluated aspects like tuition quality, value for money, and the expertise of instructors. For example, some described 'various cameras,' or mentioned 'the newly released 660 Canon' and provided insight into how such equipment enhanced the learning experience. The use of headings was a feature of stronger work, helping to organise content into sections while signposting focus areas for the reader.

Stronger responses tended to have an engaging and consistent voice throughout, the writers not only providing details of the course, but also their feelings and reactions too. They kept form in mind throughout, using evaluative language and providing recommendations: 'Overall, this course was one of the best I have experienced in recent years, and I urge you to take it too. You'll end the day with a dozen beautiful pictures, a smile on your face, and a sense of pride knowing that you created your own art.' They effectively developed a relationship with the reader and structured the review to focus on several key aspects of the experience, such as the venue, teaching quality, course content, and outcomes. For example, one candidate remarked, 'The organisation of the course was a real surprise,' effectively embedding a personal opinion. Others took a creative approach to tone and introduction, for example: 'Welcome back to the blog, clickers! That's what I call photographers who click at everything. You are in for a ride, for today I am going to talk about "SNAP ON THE MAP!" a photography course hosted by Tomorrow's Photos for beginners.' These openings established a clear voice while immediately situating the reader in a review format.

Weaker responses often showed misunderstanding or only partially addressed the requirements of the review genre. Some responses read more like descriptive accounts of the day or course without offering critical opinion or evaluation. First impressions of the organisers were overly long. There were several straightforward recounts with little evaluation of the course, even at the close. Such responses therefore lacked key features of a review, including little or no direct address to the audience. The 'beginners' aspect of the question did not feature much in weaker responses. Others presented the review as an afterthought – for instance, 'I give this 5/5' – and did not build meaningful commentary around their experiences. Some candidates spent long paragraphs listing what they knew about photography or different cameras, often unrelated to the course itself. Grammar, punctuation and spelling errors were frequent, as in: 'As soon as I entered the workers there welcomed me with choclates which were amazing and hot Arabic coffee.' Sentence boundaries were often unclear and verb tense usage was inconsistent. Some candidates switched between past and present without purpose, making the structure difficult to follow.

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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 without much variety is preferable to expression that does not flow, in long, rambling sentences. Often, weaker candidates lose control of grammar when they attempt to write in long, complex sentences. One error that again 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. They should focus on answering each aspect of the task, ensuring that all content is relevant. Writing should be purposeful, without rambling or unnecessary filler content.
- To ensure that candidates do 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. In order to achieve the task (one of the Level 3 criteria on the mark scheme) the instructions must be followed.
- 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 who have difficulty with tense selection should focus on writing in one tense, preferably either the present tense or the simple past tense.
- 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 need to ensure that they provide evidence from their text to support points made in the **Question 1(b)** commentary. It is helpful to candidates to use a clear structure for this question, such as a PEA structure (Point, Evidence, Analysis).
- 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 full of errors, possibly indicating that they had run out of time to check their work.

Stronger responses to **Question 1(a)** focused clearly on the question and made for effective blog entries which engaged the peer group audience. They created a sense of enthusiasm for learning and encouraged

the audience to learn a new skill. Weaker responses were unclear in terms of the purpose of the blog. These candidates often gave an account of how they learned a new skill without there being any sense of it being their first blog entry. Their ideas were disorganised and sometimes 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, and 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 (review, descriptive piece or speech), 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 simple recounts of the walking tour, with very little in the way of critique or personal opinion, some responses to **Question 3** were more narrative than descriptive, and some **Question 4** responses lacked any sense of being in an appropriate form for a speech.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Shorter writing and reflective commentary

You have just started learning a new skill. You have always wanted to learn this skill, but you never thought you would be able to. You decide to write a blog about your experience.

(a)   Write the text for your first blog entry, using no more than 400 words. In your writing, create a sense of enthusiasm for learning new skills.

Most candidates demonstrated a good awareness of blog conventions, especially the use of a conversational, light-hearted tone, and they approached this question enthusiastically. Subjects ranged from various sports, such as running, basketball, tennis and golf, to hobbies such as massage, origami, playing the guitar, crocheting and cooking. There was typically a strong emphasis on the difficulty of learning a new skill but also a recognition that the process of learning was extremely satisfying. Approaches varied, with some candidates opting for an anecdotal style, citing a long-lost yearning to play the piano, for example. This required 'dusting off my grandma's piano' which briefly evoked memories from childhood, wishing to honour their grandma's memory. Referencing members of a family as 'coaches' in acquiring a new skill was quite a common approach taken, and it came across to the reader as genuine and touching.

Stronger blogs included a range of conventions to organise the text, including catchy titles and sub-headings. These candidates grasped the purpose of the task and clearly outlined the fact that they had *just begun* to learn a new skill, rather than recounting full mastery of it. Such candidates understood the conventions of a blog and used them effectively to build a rapport with the reader. Some responses did include informal lexis, such as, 'So there you go guys, there's my story of how I learned a new skill', which was, in many cases, appropriate, due to the genre. When used judiciously, this informal tone helped establish a conversational and authentic voice.

Many strong responses began with engaging openings that sparked reader interest, such as*:* I've always had a fascination with novel party tricks like juggling or pen spinning.' This kind of introduction set the tone and provided a natural lead-in to the main narrative. Stronger entries often addressed the reader directly, employing questions or reflections, for example: 'Trust me, a little bit of something new can work wonders for your general happiness,' and 'For anyone who has tried something and failed, I encourage you to push through.'

Some responses deployed subject-specific lexis effectively to show a sense of growing mastery of the skill, while not forgetting the need to explain some of this lexis to the more general readership. In this response, the candidate wrote about learning to cook: 'I've always been bad at anything related to the culinary arts, from gingerbread cookies that wail in agony to soup that looks like something out of the Wastelands. I've never been a Picasso or Van Gogh of cooking'.

More successful candidates demonstrated their ability to describe the difficulty of learning the new skill whilst also conveying a sense of enthusiasm. Many encouraged the reader to give it a go by using an encouraging tone and suggesting common barriers to learning the specific skill. One

notable blog, in which the writer described himself as 'feeling like Sisyphus struggling to push back against the endless waterfall of years' was written about a course in coding. Another drew this conclusion: 'Every time I fail, it is just more progress to break the barrier and learn and grow.'

Many weaker entries simply described an activity, without reference to the process of learning the skill. These candidates often adopted a more generalised approach by saying the skill was beneficial without giving any specific examples. Other weaker responses were very short, sometimes of under 150 words, or focussed too heavily on the backstory of why the writer wanted to learn the skill, rather than the process of starting to learn it, hence demonstrating misinterpretation of the prompt. Some responses described an extended journey of practice and eventual mastery, thereby drifting away from the actual requirements of the task. This often resulted in a loss of focus and underdevelopment of key ideas.

In terms of structure, weaker responses were sometimes unfocused or lacked cohesion, with tangential details that distracted from the core narrative. Additionally, many of these responses revealed a struggle to convey a consistent or appropriate tone for a blog. One of the most significant weaknesses was a lack of control over verb tenses. As this task required clear shifts between past and present tenses, for example recounting a past experience while reflecting on it in the present, candidates who did not demonstrate tense accuracy were hindered in both clarity and style. Weaker responses were often brief, lacking in details as to the importance of learning something new. Sentences were undeveloped, as in 'I learned so much' but never saying what or how. Other weaker responses contained frequent errors of all kinds, as in this example: 'Im not tall enought and I do not know how to walk properly. Maybe I did not born to be a model. My body was my insecure and my dream was to big for me.'

(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, Analysis 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 blog entries and explaining the effect on the audience. However, some responses were limited in detail and did not provide any evidence from the **Question 1(a)** response.

Stronger responses displayed candidates' ability to identify key elements of blog writing and demonstrated thoughtful reflection on their language and stylistic choices. For example, some noted their use of the first-person perspective to convey personal experience and their deliberate shift to second person to 'address the audience and create a sense of relatability and intimacy'. This demonstrated clear awareness of both audience and form. A few candidates also acknowledged the typical demographic of a blog audience, often younger readers, and used this to justify their use of colloquial language. Terms like 'so there you go guys' or signoffs like 'Peace out' were explained as part of establishing a more informal register, suitable for the genre and audience. One candidate commented on the importance of their final sentence, 'Why have you not tried something new dear friends?' The analysis was clear: 'This not only appeals to typical features of a blog, by engaging with the reader in a casual manner, but it makes the reader ponder on their own unfulfilled passions as well.'

In addition, stronger responses engaged with lexical choices, noting the use of positive diction such as 'victorious' and 'confident' to foster a sense of empowerment and encouragement. These candidates understood the role of tone in achieving purpose, and linked language choices directly to audience impact. Other candidates gave some precise analysis, such as in this example: 'In addition the author utilizes hypophora within the reflection. They write "Was I afraid of falling? Not really. Was I afraid of proving my parents right? Maybe a little bit. Was I afraid of failing? Probably." The use of hypophora brings a sense of the author's train of thoughts as if going down a list of the author's fears. It brings focus to the fears the author experienced in a concise fashion.'

In many weaker responses, candidates focused almost exclusively on the content of their responses, providing no analysis of their linguistic choices. Weaker responses were lacking terms of construction of the **Question 1(a)** response using specific linguistic techniques, stylistic choices, or an awareness of form. As a result, they were left with very little material to analyse in **Question 1(b)**. Instead of identifying and evaluating specific choices, many summarised the content of their blog or made vague statements about tone or style without supporting examples. They often

concentrated on describing structure and format with generalised comments such as, 'I use typical aspects seen in a blog such as paragraph format and a title.'

In weaker responses, while candidates attempted to explain that their writing was intended to be 'encouraging' or 'relatable', they rarely unpacked *how* these effects were achieved. A common weakness was commenting only on the number of paragraphs or sentence types used – for example, 'I used five paragraphs' or 'I used simple and compound sentences' – without explaining the purpose or effect of these structural decisions. This lack of detail or connection of techniques to intended effects significantly limited the effectiveness of the analysis.

Many weaker responses were also short, included no examples, contained frequent errors or were inappropriate in tone. One typical response included the following vague paragraph: 'The structure of my blog was very organise. It had short or long paragraphs. For languages in my blog, I had imperative verbs throughout my writing to show what tense this writing was on. I included some past tense to my blog. There was some simile sentence in my blog.' Other responses were extremely short, sometimes under 100 words, and in some cases the question was not attempted.

Section B: Extended writing

Question 2 – Review

You recently saw an advertisement for a two-hour city walking tour called *Hidden Secrets*. You went on the tour last weekend. Write a review of this tour, which will be published on a travel website. Write between 600 and 900 words

Many candidates relied heavily on an anecdotal style, with lengthy preambles covering details regarding gatherings in the reception areas of hotels, with commentary on the appearance of the tour guide and other members of the tour. The 'hidden secrets' aspect of the tour was overlooked by some candidates, though it was integrated well by others who followed a clear review form, with some evaluative lexis being included.

In stronger responses, candidates employed a paragraphed, chronological structure – often with the use of headings and sub-headings – to describe the tour, and provided clear recommendations. They used an engaging, informative tone to both describe the walking tour and to address the extent to which it exposed the 'hidden secrets' of the area. They often provided a brief backstory but then focused on reviewing key elements of the tour such as the tour guide, the sights seen, the organisation, and the experience itself.

An effective strategy was to begin with an engaging introduction that captured attention and clearly stated the review's purpose. For example, a candidate wrote: 'One would think that the "secrets" of the beautiful city of Paris would have all been uncovered long ago, but the walking tour my wife and I recently took part in blew that theory out of the water.'

Such candidates established a clear personal voice, for example: 'Initially I was worried that my kids would not enjoy the tour, but they loved it!' They also addressed their audience directly, using phrases like, 'Happy travels everyone!' and employed description to good effect, as in this example: 'There lay cherry blossom trees encapsulating the beautiful architecture.' One candidate, reviewing Panoma Beach, used language to illustrate the beauty of the sea – 'a pool of glistening sea foam' – together with a stop on the tour to marvel at the hidden secrets of 'shells like pearls'

Other candidates employed a humorous or faintly ironic tone with some success, as in this example: 'While I do not doubt that Washington has many hidden secrets, they will remain hidden for eternity if this tour company continues in business. The biggest "hidden secret" on this tour was the "voluntary" added gratuity they charged us at the end of the tour. Secret indeed…'.

Weaker responses were often purely anecdotal with narrative descriptions of the tour, which relied on a chronological approach and offered little in the way of personal feedback or evaluation of whether one should do the tour or not. The review portion was sometimes tacked on at the end in a rather ad hoc fashion that fell short of meeting the task's purpose thoroughly. Some candidates did not name the location, or they made a name up, or place names were vague with no reference or attempt to explore 'hidden secrets.'

Such candidates tended to write a very personal account of a tour, not always of a city, without really addressing the prompt. The purpose and audience were often unclear and structure was weak, leading to disorganised, rambling responses: 'When we finally arrived at the meeting point there were loads of people waiting around and we had to just hope we were in the right group. They were handing out water bottles but

we were at the back so we did not get any, and it was a hot day too so we really could have used some water to stop us getting dehydrated.'

Weaker responses tended to be overly critical without suggesting what would make the tour better, and many were short, sometimes of well under 400 words. Some candidates started with fairly clear introductions that attempted to grab the attention of the reader and mainly stated the review's purpose. However, their language was overly simplistic and failed to address the specifics of the tour, resulting in a monotonous tone that failed to engage the reader.

Question 3 – Descriptive piece

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

Some candidates used a narrative frame, which was sometimes successful but occasionally replaced more relevant, descriptive content. A range of interpretations was seen; as well as natural settings of woods and rivers, some interpreted a more urban landscape. Better responses were often linked by the passing of time such as a twenty-four-hour period or the passing of the seasons.

In stronger pieces, the writer maintained focus on the present rather than trying to explain how they had got to the valley. Use of advanced vocabulary and phrasing kept the focus on the sounds, colours and movements in the valley's surroundings, for example: 'A small stone path snaked through the valley like a winding river of rock darting in between the patches of bright flowers.'

Such candidates often made use of sensory language, particularly sound and imagery. One effective example described 'the excited hum of conversation among the bumblebees', which introduced a subtle sense of life and movement to the setting. Another used visual imagery to evoke scale and permanence: 'With the entire valley nestled between them, they stood like stony guards, moving for no one and standing mighty and proud.' The best responses demonstrated rich vocabulary and figurative language throughout, with vivid imagery and striking similes. For instance, one candidate wrote, 'An astonishing sight, a rich kaleidoscope of vibrant blooms sprouting from the lush expanse of grass,' which was both precise and evocative. Another offered an original and humorous sensory comparison: 'Those flowers smell like your dead grandmother's perfume; feminine yet forceful.'

Such moments elevated the work by offering the reader both imaginative flair and concrete detail, hallmarks of higher-level descriptive writing. Candidates who succeeded in this task usually demonstrated stronger technical control, particularly with grammar, spelling and sentence variety, and were more disciplined in maintaining focus on setting rather than drifting into narrative. Another candidate wrote: 'The valley was teeming with life. Millions of years of sharp rain and howling winds had created a deep gash within the crust of the earth. The afternoon sun loomed above the valley as the foliage and animals bathed in the sunlight.'

Weaker responses lacked cohesion, drifted into narrative, or relied too heavily on generic description. Even where some descriptive language was attempted, it was often vague or overused – for example, references to 'birds chirping', 'the sun shining' and 'a peaceful valley' appeared repeatedly without variation or deeper effect. These candidates also tended to rely on basic vocabulary and struggled with sentence control, leading to repetitive phrasing and grammatical inconsistency.

Frequently in very weak responses, candidates misinterpreted the task, shifting into full-blown narrative mode with minimal, or superficial, descriptive content. These responses focused on plot-driven action rather than atmosphere or setting, resulting in a loss of focus on the descriptive requirements of the task. The setting was mentioned briefly or in passing, with little development of sensory experience or concrete detail. Some candidates used the title to write a story about a place called 'The Valley' without creating effective description or focus on sensory imagery. They also changed tenses frequently and were imprecise in their direction and sense of writing style. They described how they had travelled to the valley and often peopled their description with characters who had lengthy backstories. These characters often engaged in conversations, which meant several lines of poorly punctuated speech with no focus on description.

Question 4 – Speech

You are going to take part in a debate at school about whether children should be allowed to use social media before the age of 16. 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 creating a sense of interest in the debate. Write between 600 and 900 words.

Candidates generally adopted a clear structure, discussing the advantages of allowing 16-year-olds to access social media. Most responses had an opening address and a suitable closing line. However, not all candidates included direct address to the audience, making the text more of a discursive essay than a speech. Introductory paragraphs were common, giving some context with regards to the place of social media today. Most arguments were credible, including the need to understand what is happening in the world since newspapers do not attract the average 16-year-old. The importance of maintaining contact with their peers was a common argument. Candidates referenced the pandemic and social isolation as a further strong argument.

Stronger responses showed understanding of the need to present a balanced discussion, addressing both the benefits and drawbacks of social media use among young people. These responses were often structured using effective discourse markers such as 'however', 'in contrast', or 'moreover' to transition between contrasting viewpoints. They also demonstrated an awareness of their audience by using a respectful tone and controlled rhetorical techniques.

More successful candidates often employed logos, pathos, or ethos to establish credibility and connect with their listeners. For example, one candidate cited a relevant statistic: 'A study shows that teens with social media learn 30 per cent more about political and economic issues than teens without social media.' Another appealed to unity and broader social values: 'At the end of the day, social media is a tool that brings people together, not rips them apart.' Such candidates sometimes indicated their personal stance subtly, while still remaining open to other ideas. They were careful not to alienate any portion of their audience and demonstrated maturity in tone, thought, and structure. Their use of evidence, examples, and rhetorical strategies helped to deliver a reasoned and persuasive argument.

Stronger responses reflected in depth on the dangers of social media for young people and many commented on the effect of social media on mental health. A range of rhetorical techniques was employed, which served to pique interest in the audience, as in this example: 'While doomscrolling, social media consumers mindlessly consume more and more vacuous content. Have you ever felt like hours of your life have gone by in an instant while on social media?' Stronger responses provided a concluding paragraph, offering the writer's own point of view or summarising the main points: 'No matter how beneficial social media can be, it is the actual detriments that must, at the end of the day, be taken account of.'

In weaker responses, candidates often struggled to maintain the appropriate register. Many slipped into overly informal language or relied heavily on colloquial expressions and flawed structures. In addition to register issues, weaker responses often focused on a single side of the argument, usually opposing the ban, and presented it vociferously, without acknowledging alternative perspectives. Some responses veered into general arguments about mobile phone use or communication, thereby missing the more specific requirement to address social media and its impact on young people. As a result, these responses tended to lack focus, development and structural coherence.

Other weaker responses lacked paragraphing and demonstrated a lack of technical accuracy, such as in this example: 'The world is to leanient with social media. Social media isnt safe for anyone. Its not the platform. Its the people. The people who let children on these platforms and the people who should have common knawlege for children.'

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 8695/21
Drama, Poetry and Prose

Key messages

1. Learners should show evidence of literary analysis in discursive option **(a)** essays, as well as in passage-based option **(b)** questions.
2. Essays should include some form of contextualisation to support the learner's arguments.

General comments

This session, once again, responses were seen at every level of assessment, with some learners reaching the highest level on nearly every text on the paper. Some scripts were disadvantaged by rubric errors, most often because the learner had attempted more than the stipulated two questions or had answered two questions from the same section. Only a very few learners appeared to have time problems, causing the second essay to be either rushed or incomplete. The vast majority of learners followed the rubric accurately and with a clear balance between the two answers. The standard of written English was also at least satisfactory with all but a few learners adopting an appropriate style and register. Nearly every candidate was able to show at least a basic knowledge and understanding of two texts and many learners showed evidence of a real engagement with and enjoyment of them.

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

1. Assessment Objective 2 from the Literature in English syllabus states that learners should 'analyse ways in which writers' choices of language, form and structure shape meanings and effects.' Learners attempting option **(b)** passage questions often showed evidence of meeting this Assessment Objective in their responses to the given passage. However, learners attempting option **(a)** questions, the discursive essay, also need to provide evidence that they are able to do this, by quoting or referring closely to specific moments in the text and considering the dramatic or poetic methods chosen by the writer. Learners may then explore the effects of those choices, showing how they support the arguments in their essays in response to the specific question.

2. Learners responding to option **(b)** passage questions, who are able to briefly place the passage within the wider work it is selected from, often write more focused and relevant answers. This is often, and possibly best, done at the start of the essay. With drama passages, learners should consider the significance of the passage to the play as a whole – this might be in terms of characterisation, plot or important revelations. In poetry answers, the context might be some aspect of the background to the poem, possibly biographical or historical, which is important to the learner's interpretation. Learners should be encouraged to consider this approach, as it will give a context to their interpretation of the passage itself, as well as providing evidence of knowledge of the text.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Drama

Question 1

ERROL JOHN: *Moon on a Rainbow Shawl*

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

(a) This was the least popular question in the drama section. Most learners had at least a basic knowledge of Rosa's part in the play. Weaker answers tended to summarise her relationships with Epf and Old Mack and her pregnancy. Better answers discussed her role in more detail, noting the 'significance of her pregnancy to the plot, especially Epf's determination to go to England,' as one learner noted. Other sound answers explored the contrast between 'her naivety and Mavis's practicality and experience,' as one essay suggested, with other answers noting the similarity between her situation and Sophia's. More successful answers developed these connections by considering John's methods of characterisation, especially language and action, noting, for example, that her 'softness of speech, contrasted to the hardness of Mavis, suggests she might turn out like Sophia in the end,' as one learner argued. Good answers often noted the progression in her characterisation from 'the simplicity noted by Sophia to the hardness that tries to reject Epf and settle for Old Mack,' though for some learners this development in her role was not convincing. Where such arguments were supported by close reference to the text and some awareness of John's dramatic methods, the answers did well.

(b) This was the more popular choice on this text. Nearly every learner was able to place the passage in context – the robbery at Old Mack's café. Weaker answers retold Charlie's narrative, often in detail, though with too little attention on the passage. Better answers linked the audience's previous knowledge to his revelations here to Sophia, with some suggesting he 'wastes yet another opportunity by his drunken stupidity,' though most learners were more sympathetic noting 'the irony of his theft being for a good cause, Esther's education,' as one commented. More competent responses analysed his relationship with Sophia, the 'genuine concern that each shows the other,' as one learner suggested. His remorse and awareness of his guilt were seen as positive attributes, though, according to some, 'caused by his reliance on drinking to cope with his sense of failure in his cricketing career.' Better answers looked closely at John's dramatic methods – Charlie's language, his tears of remorse, Sophia's unexpected understanding and Epf's concerned involvement were all well explored. Other successful answers looked at the dramatic action: for example, how Old Mack, through his words and deeds, is contrasted to the 'likeable Charlie.' Other responses noted the movement on the stage leading up to the 'dramatic entrance of the policeman and the lowering of the lights,' all of which 'present Charlie in a positive light while building a sense of tension and anxiety in the audience,' as one summarised it. Where such arguments were supported by close reference to the passage the answers did very well.

Question 2

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Measure for Measure*

This was the second most popular drama text, with a more or less even split between the two options.

(a) Nearly every learner was able to select relevant material with which to address the task, showing at least a basic knowledge and understanding of the text. Weaker answers often approached the question with a character-by-character structure, focusing appropriately on the Duke, Angelo and Isabella. At this level some answers slipped into summarising the events in which these characters were involved – Claudio's arrest and sentence, Angelo's hypocrisy and the Duke's machinations to keep Claudio alive – with too little focus on either the law or Shakespeare's presentation. Better answers, at least implicitly, were able to contrast their attitudes – Angelo's and Isabella's strictness with the Duke's laxity, for example. Competent answers developed such points into a consideration of Shakespeare's methods of characterisation, noting, for example, that 'all three of them change their attitude when faced with temptation – Angelo's lust, Isabella's desire to save her brother and the Duke's wish to act like a leader,' as one learner summarised it. Other competent answers considered the range of attitudes Shakespeare presents. The different social ranks, gender and age groups were all well contrasted and often clearly supported by close reference to the task. More successful answers analysed the language as well as the characters, with very good

contrasts made in some cases between Angelo's 'legalistic pomposity in his exchanges with Escalus and Isabella and his clear self-awareness in his soliloquies,' as one learner noted. Other good responses contrasted Lucio's 'coarse, though often appropriate language criticising the state and the law' with the more balanced words of Escalus. Very good answers looked at the dramatic effects of the clash between the different attitudes – notably Angelo and Isabella but also Lucio and the Duke. These were seen by some learners as the 'driving force of the plot,' often citing Claudio's acceptance of his wrongdoing but 'evident desire to stay alive' as indicative of the effect of the 'legal confusion on the ordinary citizen,' as one learner argued. The most successful essays developed these points through close reference to the text and a perceptive grasp of appropriate contexts, very often the court or writings of King James 1st.

(b) This was the slightly more popular option on this text. Nearly every learner had some knowledge and understanding of Claudio's situation and was able to place the passage in an appropriate context. Weaker answers often detailed the events leading to Claudio's imprisonment and were sometimes distracted into discussing Angelo and Isabella in too much detail, with a consequent loss of focus on the task and the passage. Basic answers were aware of the dramatic situation – the Duke's disguise and Isabella's rejection of Angelo's proposal, for example – and explored at least implicitly some of the ironies that Shakespeare presents. Better answers identified the emotional shifts in Claudio's reactions – 'from courage and acceptance of death to fear and desperation,' as one learner summarised it. More competent answers analysed how Claudio's emotional journey is presented by Shakespeare through dialogue and timing (for example, the arrival of Isabella) to shape audience sympathy and highlight his internal conflict. Good answers also explored the use of metaphor and rhetorical questions, with some considering the significance of Isabella's moral challenge and Claudio's moment of shame. In answers at this level, there was often a focus on the presentation of Claudio's 'attitude towards his impending death,' as one candidate wrote, often contrasted with Isabella's attitude towards his plight. Other good responses noted the 'persistent string of questions' that Claudio asks that have the effect of 'convincing himself to accept his death' while at the same time pleading with Isabella for her intercession, 'clear proof of his bewildered mental state,' according to one learner. Many candidates at this level examined Shakespeare's methods in detail, for example the macabre simile at lines 60 – 61, often interpreting it as the strongest suggestion that 'Claudio has become resigned to die and Shakespeare will let him during the course of the play,' as one essay suggested. Others remembered the setting and staging, often discussing the 'disguised and hidden duke overhearing their private talk,' which for some learners was 'symbolic of his shadowy role in Claudio's experiences throughout the play.' Where such arguments were supported by close reference to the passage and the wider text the responses did very well.

Question 3

JOHN WEBSTER: *The Duchess of Malfi*

This was a minority choice, with a more or less even split between the two options.

(a) Most of the responses were able to select relevant points from the text with which to address the task. Weaker responses summarised the relationship between the Duchess and Antonio often in detail. Basic answers, at least implicitly, had some understanding of their attitudes to marriage, 'her defiant and determined focus on getting her man, contrasting with his fear and reticence,' as one learner noted. Answers at this level tended to focus on the characters, rather than Webster's portrayal of attitudes to marriage. More competent answers did explore the different attitudes more closely, with some sound discussions of the differing responses from the Cardinal and Ferdinand to news of the Duchess's marriage. Better answers considered the effects of these differences, often developing arguments by referring to contextual matters such as contemporary attitudes to women and the 'public nature of marital decisions, seen as significant both politically and socially,' as one learner suggested. Such ideas were developed by analysing the contrasts created by Webster through the 'private nature of the Duchess's decision turning into the public tragedy of her murder and Bosola's subsequent revenge,' as one candidate wrote. Very good answers argued that the different attitudes to marriage were fundamental to the 'play's conflicts and hence its structure,' though for some learners, marriage was 'a euphemism for sexual desire,' and the Duchess's decision to marry Antonio was seen 'as a defensive measure to counter the interference of her brothers,' as one learner argued. Very good responses supported their arguments with close reference to the text and a perceptive awareness of Webster's dramatic methods, particularly his poetic language and use of setting and action.

(b) This was the slightly less popular choice on the text. Weak answers were unsure of the context and situation at this point in the play, for example, misreading Bosola's cynicism as sincerity and a desire to serve his superior. Basic answers often summarised Bosola's role and character in the play generally, with only intermittent focus on the passage itself. Better answers at this level were aware of its significance in terms of Bosola's (and the Duchess's) futures, noting that 'his acceptance of the job is the first step towards the death of the Duchess, her family and Bosola himself,' as one learner suggested. More competent responses displayed sound understanding of Bosola's sarcasm, moral conflict, and reluctant complicity, with some learners linking this to his presentation elsewhere in the play. Stronger answers explored the power dynamics between the two men, aware of the social context and in some cases of the 'tradition of the malcontent,' as one essay put it. Very good responses were alive to Webster's dramatic methods, for example Bosola's use of metaphor and irony, while others noted how Webster creates 'dramatic tension in Bosola's conflicting ambition and integrity,' as one essay argued. Candidates at this level often commented on Webster's use of language, satirical tone and the imagery of corruption and moral decay, which for some learners were 'typical of the perverse atmosphere of the play generally.' Answers at this level were confident in linking Bosola's characterisation here to the wider text, often supporting arguments with apposite quotation and perceptive analysis of the effects of Webster's choices.

Question 4

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

(a) Nearly every response chose relevant material with which to address the task. Weaker answers summarised a selection of the relationships often in accurate detail, most commonly Maggie and Brick and Big Mama and Big Daddy. Better answers at this level had some basic ideas of the changes in these relationships, such as the effects of Maggie's liaison with Skipper and Big Daddy's cancer. More competent responses considered how Williams explores the impact of these events on the relationships, with nearly all learners arguing that it was negative and, in some cases, supporting this view with reference to appropriate biographical contexts. Sound answers also looked at a wider range of relationships, parents and children, brothers, and, though rarely, sisters-in-law. Textual support was nearly always appropriate at this level and, at least implicitly, contrasts between the relationships were made, as well as some appreciation of Williams's dramatic methods. As one learner summarised it, 'it is the changes he creates on stage that leads to the conflicts that in turn leads to the drama.' More successful answers analysed Williams's methods in detail, particularly his use of stage directions 'as a tool of characterisation,' as one essay noted, and 'his use of language ranging from Maggie's flippant anxiety to Big Daddy's coarseness and Brick's disengagement.' Stronger answers were comfortable in discussing the dramatic action, such as the slapping of the child, as well as Williams's use of symbolic props such as Brick's crutch ('a very sharp symbol of the changes in him and therefore his marriage') and the legal briefcase ('which symbolised how Gooper's role in the family and his relationship with his parents had changed'). Very good answers supported such arguments with close analysis of key moments in the play, with awareness of appropriate contexts, but directly considering 'how Williams by his exploration of the effects of changing relationships creates an engrossing drama.'

(b) This question was the most popular on the paper. Nearly every learner had at least a basic knowledge of the situation and offered, at least implicitly, an appropriate context, often referring to Big Daddy's 'false diagnosis of a spastic colon, instead of cancer.' Most answers discussed Big Daddy's mood and attitudes here, particularly towards Big Mama. Some learners considered his 'disgust of her as typical of males of the period,' with more successful answers offering appropriate contexts in support. Other answers at this level had some understanding of the tensions in the family, and how 'by the discreet withdrawal of the rest of the family, Williams indicates Big Daddy's outburst is neither unusual nor unexpected,' as one learner argued. More competent responses considered some of the dramatic methods, particularly the use of stage directions and their effects, as well as Williams's choice of language, which 'emphasises Big Daddy's coarseness as well as Big Mama's genuine shock at his behaviour,' as one learner saw it. Other sound answers argued that Big Daddy is 'revealing his vulnerability here, in his fear of death or even becoming secondary to Big Mama,' which better answers developed by reference to the wider text, most often his conversation with Brick. Good answers were alive to the nuances of Williams's choices: the repetition of 'dying', the emphasis on Big Mama's size, the effect of the fireworks and Big Daddy's 'selfish use of I and me,' were all popular points of analysis. Very good answers structured such analysis with apposite references to both passage and wider text, with supporting contextual points well integrated into the arguments, but always closely focused on the range of Williams's dramatic methods and, crucially, their effects on the audience.

Section B: Poetry

Question 5

MAYA ANGELOU: *And Still I Rise*

This was a popular choice in this session, with the large majority choosing the passage **(b)** question.

(a)   Nearly every learner selected appropriate poems with which to address the task, though some weaker answers struggled because of a restricted knowledge of the text. Other weaker answers discussed more than the required two poems with a consequent lack of depth in the interpretation and the analysis. Popular combinations were *Phenomenal Woman* with *Men*, *Remembrance* with *Woman Work*, and *A Kind of Love* with *Still I Rise* or *Country Lover*. Basic answers tended to offer paraphrases of the poems, with general comments about empowerment or victimhood, often lacking close textual support or sufficient appreciation of Angelou's poetic methods. As learners showed more understanding of some of Angelou's key themes such as race, empowerment and objectification, and were able to link them to her presentation of different attitudes to sex, so the answers became more successful. Competent responses discussed how sex 'intersects with power, race, and identity in Angelou's poetic voice,' as one learner summarised it. Stronger responses examined how Angelou reclaims sexual agency, celebrates female desire, and critiques exploitative or objectifying male attitudes. These responses included confident discussions of voice, tone and metaphor, as well as references to Angelou's social and historical context. For example, one learner suggested that in *Still I Rise*, 'the image of "diamonds at the meeting of my thighs" is bold and celebratory, suggesting a self-possessed and unapologetic embrace of her sensuality and sexuality, even in the face of oppression.' Other very good responses analysed tone, voice and rhetorical strategies (repetition, sensual imagery and biblical allusions were all perceptively discussed). Answers at this level were always confident in knowledge of the poems and understanding of Angelou's poetic concerns. Where such responses also offered perceptive insights into her poetic methods and their effects, the answers did very well.

(b)   This was the second most popular question in the poetry section. Weak answers offered a range of misinterpretations, assuming Bailey to be a sister, a friend, a lover, or 'someone' rather than Angelou's brother. This reflected a lack of knowledge of the poem and its context, suggestive of discussing the poem as an unseen. This led to surface-level commentaries such as 'the speaker is sad' with no textual support or analysis. Basic answers recognised the nature of the relationship, often with some awareness of Angelou's biography, which led to more convincing interpretations. At this level, learners tended to ignore poetic methods and focused on paraphrasing the content. Answers which were straightforward or above always understood the familial bond between speaker and Bailey and explored how it was 'rooted in trauma, memory, and resilience,' as one learner suggested. More competent responses analysed some of Angelou's poetic methods, particularly her language choices and use of imagery such as 'red rings/Of blood and loneliness' and mythological and biblical references (Sheba, Eve, Lilith). A more confident understanding of these choices enabled learners to offer a developed and nuanced interpretation of the relationship. Stronger candidates recognised the complex emotional tones – ranging from love and loss to frustration and longing – and analysed a range of poetic methods to support their more perceptive responses to the poem, including verse form and poetic rhythms showing how these techniques shaped the speaker's voice and attitude to her brother. Responses at this level had a firm grasp of the contexts to support their interpretations, with appropriate references made to the wider text and Angelou's typical poetic concerns.

Question 6

SIMON ARMITAGE*: Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

This was the least popular poetry text in this session, with the majority of learners choosing the passage **(b)** question.

(a)   Nearly every response had at least a basic knowledge and understanding of the text. Weaker responses tended to recount the story or describe deception as a theme without, for example, clearly connecting it to elements such as character development, reader response, or Gawain's moral journey. Better answers at a basic level selected some of the key moments of deception in the text – most often Bertilak's dual role, the attempted seduction of Gawain by his wife and the

green girdle – and explained how they were important in the poem. More competent responses developed this approach linking into 'the knightly codes of chivalry and honour,' with some responses supporting their points with contextual references, as well as apposite quotations. Stronger answers explored how Armitage presents 'Gawain's internal conflict through his self-deception over the girdle, which challenges his chivalric ideals,' as one learner summarised it. This was further developed in some essays into recognising how 'the real deception in the poem is the codes of chivalry, which Armitage presents to be flawed,' as one essay suggested. At this level there was some perceptive discussion of Armitage's methods, such as narrative voice, structure and language, particularly the use of 'green', variously interpreted as a sign of growth and renewal or symbolic of witchcraft and evil. Other strong responses considered Armitage's use of irony and courtly romance conventions. There were only a few responses that were confident in discussing Armitage's alliterative verse, which was a limiting factor in otherwise confident essays. Those learners who could discuss Armitage's poetic methods with insight and appropriate textual support did very well.

(b) Most responses had sufficient knowledge and understanding of the text to discuss the significance of this exchange to the presentation of the relationship as well as the text more generally. Weaker responses, with less secure knowledge tended to treat the interaction as a light-hearted exchange without deeper understanding or sufficient grasp of the context. Basic answers were able to discuss the wager and also the role of the lady with some understanding. More competent responses considered the Lord's characterisation either as 'proud, brave and sociable' or a 'king-like warrior and hunter' or 'a boastful and exuberant host.' Gawain's characterisation was often seen as careful, judicious, prudent, 'a chivalric knight but a shrewd one,' as one learner suggested, though for some 'the lord's joviality contrasts with Gawain's growing discomfort,' according to another. Stronger answers considered Armitage's methods and concerns in detail, often analysing the symbolic value of exchanged gifts and kisses. Other responses at this level engaged with diction ('game', 'wager' and 'gain') to highlight the moral ambiguity of the relationship. Very good responses explored the performative politeness between the two men, and underlying tension thereby created. At this level there was often confident, even perceptive, analysis of Armitage's alliterative verse and how he uses it to enhance the 'overt friendliness and underlying conflict between the two men,' as one learner suggested. Where such interpretations were supported by quotation from the passage and some awareness of the context, the answers did very well.

Question 7

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

This was a minority choice of text with the large majority of learners choosing the passage **(b)** question.

(a) There were only a small number of responses seen on this question. Nearly every learner selected relevant poems with which to address the question and most learners considered animals, with *The Lamb* and *The Tyger* being very popular choices. Other learners saw humans as 'living creatures' with *London*, the two chimney sweeper poems and *The School Boy* all popular choices. Weaker answers tended to interpret animals literally, without considering their possible symbolic depth and often the poem selections limited comparative insight or development of Blake's contrasting concerns in the innocence and experience sections. Better answers at this level knew the poems well and could explore some of Blake's concerns, such as his social criticisms or his presentation of religion and education. More competent responses were aware of the way Blake used animals as symbols for divine, moral, or natural states, with some learners able to reference Blake's belief in dualities and link this with support from the innocence and experience poems. Stronger essays analysed their chosen poems, often with perceptive awareness of Blake's use of verse-form and 'simple but loaded diction,' as one learner suggested. Where such responses supported their ideas with apposite quotation and appropriate contextual references, the answers did very well.

(b) This question was much more popular than the discursive essay question on Blake. Candidates were asked to compare Blake's presentation of the little boy in the poems *The Little Boy Lost* and *The Little Boy Found*. At the outset of the marking standardisation process it was noted that, while it is standard for **(b)** questions to be set on a single poem, on this occasion we had set two. This was a deliberate decision. The poems *The Little Boy Lost* and *The Little Boy Found* are presented sequentially in the selected edition of Blake's *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* and it was thought that these relatively brief poems would most likely be taught as a pair. Moreover, the ways in which they may be considered as either two distinct pieces or a single unified whole is a lively source of discussion within the academic discourse. However, because this

does not align with the guidance in the syllabus document and therefore may not have matched candidates' expectations, we issued special marking instructions to examiners for the marking of **Question 7(b)**. Examiners were instructed first, to mark the question according to standard procedures. Then, where the mark awarded for **7(b)** was lower than the mark awarded to the candidate's Section A essay, **7(b)** was given an uplift in marks such that it matched the mark given to Section A. The candidate's total mark therefore became exactly double their mark for Section A. The original mark for **7(b)** was noted in a comments box which appears on the annotated script. In this way, we ensured that no candidate would be disadvantaged by the difference between this question and the guidance given in the syllabus document.

Very weak answers seemed unsure of the meaning of the poems, offering personal, but ultimately assertive interpretations, as though responding to unseen poems. Basic responses did have appropriate knowledge and understanding and often found the comparison of the poems a useful structural tool in shaping their interpretations. These were often spiritual or religious, though some learners more basically saw both poems as straightforward stories of parental neglect. More competent answers recognised the symbolic role of the father (both human and divine), the spiritual journey motif, and the simplicity of diction reflecting a child's voice, with many responses exploring the dark/light contrasts and Blake's presentation of children generally. Stronger answers analysed Blake's poetic methods, noting, for example, the use of the 'child's voice in the first poem to emphasise the vulnerability and abandonment,' while other responses saw 'the symbolic power of God returning the child to its mother.' Very good answers also explored Blake's use of rhythm, enjambment, setting and voice, often supporting the analysis with telling reference to the poems. At this level learners were confident in exploring of Blake's larger themes of innocence, experience and spiritual abandonment, supporting points with references to wider text and appropriate historical contexts.

Question 8

Songs of Ourselves, Volume 2

This was the most popular poetry text in this session but the vast majority of learners who studied it chose the **(b)** passage question.

(a)   This was the least popular poetry question. Most learners selected relevant poems with which to address the task, with popular choices being *In the Park*, *Stabat Mater*, *Surplus Value*, *Growing Old* and *Father Returning Home*. Weaker answers summarised their chosen poems or paraphrased them, with little focus on the terms of the task. Some basic answers selected key elements of the poems to discuss, including the way that regret is conveyed through reflection on either lost time or unspoken emotions or strained relationships. Learners who selected more thoughtful pairings to contrast personal and social regret, for example, were able to show a more straightforward understanding of the poets' concerns. Competent answers developed such points by considering some poetic methods, particularly language, imagery and tone, with stronger responses at this level contrasting the poems by judicious quotation. Good responses integrated close textual analysis with emotional and psychological insights, often supporting interpretations with carefully selected contextual points and developing arguments with insight and perception.

(b)   This was the most popular poetry question in this session. Weaker answers struggled with some of the references to education and some of the imagery, suggesting they were responding to an unseen poem. Basic responses did have some knowledge and understanding of the poem, but at times offered opinions more generally on Singapore education and 'Tiger' mums, rather than focusing on the given poem. Personal response at this level varied between seeing the mother as abusive and some sort of monster to characterising the boy as 'lazy and unappreciative of the opportunities he is being given.' Better answers at this level did see the dual perspective and 'the significance of social pressures reflected through the mother's actions,' as one learner suggested. More competent responses developed such ideas by considering some aspects of Yap's poetic methods – his use of voice, the speaker's perspective and the switch to the boy's reactions. Language and imagery were often well explored and as learners showed awareness of the imagery drawn from education and music so did the responses become more successful. For example, some responses analysed word play ('adagio' and 'consonant-vowel figure') to show the emotional cost and explore how Yap undermines the mother's own education. Repetition, punctuation and structure were all well analysed at this level, with the strongest responses showing a perceptive grasp of the effects of Yap's choices, such as the predator-prey imagery which 'so clearly evokes the tone and nature of the relationship,' as one learner argued. Other very good responses

explored the 'underlying ironic tone conveying the sadness of such a flawed relationship between mother and son,' as one learner argued. At this level, contextual knowledge was well integrated into the arguments, with a number of learners wondering if Yap was the boy in the poem and 'hence why the tone is so poignant and bitter.'

Section C: Prose

Question 9

KIRAN DESAI: *The Inheritance of Loss*

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

Question 10

Stories of Ourselves, Volume 1

This was a minority choice in this session, with nearly every response choosing the **(b)** passage option.

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

(b)   The few responses seen generally had at least a basic knowledge and understanding of the text with which to address the task. Weaker answers paraphrased the passage and/or summarised the rest of the story. More straightforward responses, noting the use of the aliens' voice, were able to offer a limited analysis of Lessing's methods and showed some grasp of the significance of their response to the human reaction to the impending disaster and the aliens' attempts to warn them.

Some learners recognised that 'according to the aliens, we are frail creatures with poor memories and a great talent for self-destruction,' as one essay put it. Other more competent responses saw that Lessing's presentation was 'a critical analysis of human nature and its indifference towards life.' Where there was awareness of the narrative methods used, the essays became competent: 'Lessing adds to the oddness of humans by using a formal, reporting tone,' one essay suggested.

Stronger answers did show some awareness of the irony of the authorial point of view behind the alien narrative voice and made some interesting contextual references to the counterculture of the 1970s. This led to more extended explorations of the misunderstanding between aliens and humans underpinning the passage with some appreciation of Lessing's satirical methods. There were few learners confident enough to analyse Lessing's narrative structures, beyond voice and tone, but those that did often performed well.

Question 11

EVELYN WAUGH: A Handful of Dust

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

Question 12

COLSON WHITEHEAD: *The Underground Railroad*

This was the most popular text in Section C: Prose, but all but a very small number attempted the **(b)** passage question.

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

(b)   There were only a small number of responses to this question. Weaker answers had only a general and restricted knowledge of the text on which to base their response. This led to some paraphrasing of the passage and general, summative descriptions of Ajarry's resilience. Basic responses had opinions on the cruelty of slavery and the inherent racism that Ajarry had to deal with. Some links to Cora's narrative were seen in more competent answers, such as the idea that Ajarry's story was the narrative starting point that drives the rest of the novel. Overall, however

there was too little engagement with the detail of the passage and too little appreciation of Whitehead's narrative structures and prose style for answers to reach the higher levels of assessment.

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Key messages

1. Learners should show evidence of literary analysis in discursive option **(a)** essays, as well as in passage-based option **(b)** questions.
2. Essays should include some form of contextualisation to support the learner's arguments.

General comments

This session, once again, responses were seen at every level of assessment, with some learners reaching the highest level on nearly every text on the paper. Some scripts were disadvantaged by rubric errors, most often because the learner had attempted more than the stipulated two questions or had answered two questions from the same section. Only a very few learners appeared to have time problems, causing the second essay to be either rushed or incomplete. The vast majority of learners followed the rubric accurately and with a clear balance between the two answers. The standard of written English was also at least satisfactory with all but a few learners adopting an appropriate style and register. Nearly every candidate was able to show at least a basic knowledge and understanding of two texts and many learners showed evidence of a real engagement with and enjoyment of them.

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

1. Assessment Objective 2 from the Literature in English syllabus states that learners should 'analyse ways in which writers' choices of language, form and structure shape meanings and effects.' Learners attempting option **(b)** passage questions often showed evidence of meeting this Assessment Objective in their responses to the given passage. However, learners attempting option **(a)** questions, the discursive essay, also need to provide evidence that they are able to do this, by quoting or referring closely to specific moments in the text and considering the dramatic or poetic methods chosen by the writer. Learners may then explore the effects of those choices, showing how they support the arguments in their essays in response to the specific question.

2. Learners responding to option **(b)** passage questions, who are able to briefly place the passage within the wider work it is selected from, often write more focused and relevant answers. This is often, and possibly best, done at the start of the essay. With drama passages, learners should consider the significance of the passage to the play as a whole – this might be in terms of characterisation, plot or important revelations. In poetry answers, the context might be some aspect of the background to the poem, possibly biographical or historical, which is important to the learner's interpretation. Learners should be encouraged to consider this approach, as it will give a context to their interpretation of the passage itself, as well as providing evidence of knowledge of the text.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Drama

Question 1

ERROL JOHN: *Moon on a Rainbow Shawl*

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

(a) There were only a very few responses to this question and nearly every learner had at least a basic knowledge of the text on which to base their answer. Weaker answers structured their essays by treating different characters in turn, with Esther, Charlie, Sophia and Epf all popular choices. At this level learners summarised what each of the characters did in the play, with success dependent on how well relevant material was selected. Better answers at this level at least implicitly drew contrasts between, for example, Epf's 'positive but rather fanciful notions about education,' and 'Charlie's practical approach to funding it by stealing,' as one essay summarised it. The very few essays that reached competence often had a more inclusive approach to 'education', with one learner suggesting that 'Charlie's theft in order to support his daughter was a direct result of him learning in his cricket career that life is not fair.' Another sound argument was that Mavis is 'the most educated of all of the characters for she has learnt how to manipulate those around her to get what she wants.' These sound arguments were supported by direct reference to the text but did not reach higher as there was almost no awareness of John's dramatic methods with which to develop the responses.

(b) This was the more popular option on *Moon on a Rainbow Shawl*. Most learners had at least a basic knowledge and understanding of the relationships, though weaker answers struggled with some of the connections, so that, for example, Sophia was Rosa's mother or auntie or even lover in some responses. Basic answers dealt with each relationship in turn, with some answers giving too much background context and losing focus on the passage. A more selective approach often led to straightforward answers, with some awareness of the significance, for example, of Rosa's tears at this point in the play. Some sound answers discussed the development of Sophia's attitude to Charlie here, finding it 'odd that when he is most in the wrong, she becomes the supportive and appreciative wife,' as one argued. The very few stronger answers considered some of John's dramatic methods noting for example his use of stage action (Esther running off stage and Rosa's tears) and dramatic devices such as the thunder 'which enhances the pathos of the exchange between Rosa and Sophia.'

Language was at least implicitly considered, although with little awareness of the effects of John's choices.

Question 2

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Measure for Measure*

This was a minority choice of text in this session, with most learners choosing the **(b)** passage question.

(a) Nearly every response chose relevant material with which to address the task, with most essays structuring responses around different characters. Weaker responses retold the narratives of their selected characters often in detail, though not always convincingly on the topic. Angelo, Claudio and Isabella were popular choices. Learners who contrasted them with Lucio and more minor characters such as Pompey and Mistress Overdone were more successful. More competent answers saw how Shakespeare contrasted Claudio with Angelo, whose 'hypocrisy is evident in giving way to lust and committing the same criminal act that has ensnared Claudio,' as one learner argued. More successful answers developed such character points into a consideration of Shakespeare's dramatic methods, such as the settings and particularly Angelo's soliloquys 'in which the effects of lust on a serious man are made evident,' as one essay argued. At this level, there was some clear understanding of how lust and desire are of significance to plot development, as well as awareness of 'the comic undercutting of the serious issues through the brothels and Lucio's humorous commentaries,' as one response suggested. Strong answers saw lust and desire as separate motivations in the play, for 'though Angelo's lust for Isabella creates the conflict and much of the plot, it is the Duke's desire for her that brings about the "happy" ending,' as one successful essay argued. Some essays saw a similar distinction in Claudio's situation 'for though his lust got him into trouble, his desire for life is what motivates Isabella and the Duke to find a solution.' Answers which supported such arguments with appropriate references to the text and some understanding of dramatic context often performed very well.

(b) This was the more popular question on *Measure for Measure*. Weaker answers were unsure of the context, with, for example, some learners thinking Claudio had been executed already or not understanding the nature of the relationships. More basic responses had sufficient knowledge to consider the significance of the action at this point in the play, with learners at every level united in the 'shock or even disgust at the way the Duke lies to Isabella about her brother,' which was seen

as 'unnecessarily cruel and harsh, when he could have put all things right easily,' as one learner suggested. Some learners did argue that deception was a necessary aspect of justice, 'manifested here by the Duke maintaining his disguise to manipulate the other characters to achieve the most just outcomes possible (the "unmasking" and sanctioning of Angelo, freeing Claudio),' as one learner put it. Other learners were less charitable and thought he wanted to 'facilitate his aspirations of securing a marriage with Isabella'. One candidate assessed the extract's central dialogue as a deliberate ploy by the Duke to 'stir her [Isabella's] anger' by eschewing her usual 'calm femininity' and eventually revealing the true opinion of the 'most damned Angelo' and being prompted to participate in the forthcoming bed trick to ensnare him. Competent answers also considered Lucio's role; 'his inability to see through the Duke's disguise creates dramatic irony and comedy as he slanders him again,' but others found him 'sympathetic and consoling, unlike his usual callous character.' Strong answers kept the audience firmly in mind and often linked this passage into other key moments in the play, exploring how the audience's view of, for example, the Duke 'might well be subject to serious reconsideration,' as one learner put it. Other strong answers analysed some of Shakespeare's dramatic methods closely, particularly his use of dramatic action, exits and entrances and language, with Isabella's violent words often being well discussed. Very good responses noted how this scene is 'preparing the audience for the final denouement and unveiling of the disguised Duke, by setting up Angelo, Isabella and Lucio for dramatic shocks,' as one learner summarised it. Answers at this level always paid close attention to the detail of the passage and the wording of the question.

Question 3

JOHN WEBSTER: *The Duchess of Malfi*

This was the least popular drama text in this session, with the majority of learners choosing the **(b)** passage option.

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

(b) Of the few responses seen on this question, nearly all of them had sufficient knowledge of the text to be able to discuss the significance of this exchange between the Duchess and Antonio. Weaker answers were unsure of some of the key details, such as the reference to the Duchess's brothers, for example, limiting the effectiveness of any commentary. Basic answers did explore the relationship, though were distracted into summarising the 'tragic outcomes for them and their children,' as one essay put it. Better answers at this level discussed the 'unusual power dynamics between them,' with some seeing the Duchess as 'a protofeminist' and often sympathetic to Antonio's reticence. More competent responses considered Webster's methods of characterisation, analysing how he creates the 'spirit of greatness' in the Duchess and 'Antonio's cautious, overwhelmed reactions,' as one learner suggested. Stronger answers considered the language in detail, analysing, for example, Webster's use of irony to 'undermine this happy event with a tangible sense of foreboding,' as one essay argued. Cariola's role in creating this tension was only discussed by a very few responses, but often to telling effect, especially where the points were supported by close reference to the passage and the text.

Question 4

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

This was the most popular drama text, with most learners choosing the **(b)** passage question.

(a) Nearly every learner was able to select relevant parts of the play with which to address the task. Weaker answers often had a secure basic knowledge of the text and some understanding of Williams's concerns. Success at this level was determined by how well the chosen material was shaped to the specifics of the task. Essays were most commonly structured around either the characters or their relationships, with Brick and Maggie the most popular focus, followed by Big Daddy and Big Mama. Weaker answers summarised the relationships and what happened to the characters with only passing references to 'secrets', whereas more secure basic and straightforward responses recognised that 'at the heart of each marriage and each character there is a dark secret,' as one learner noted. Most essays referred to Brick's shadowy past with Skipper and Maggie's entanglement with the two men. One noted that even 'as he complains about mendacity to his father, he keeps Maggie's affair with Skipper to himself.' Big Daddy's 'spastic

colon' and the secret of his cancer were discussed in nearly every essay. Better answers explored the dramatic effects of this 'secret' with strong answers alive to the dramatic irony it creates. Other responses explored 'the shock of Brick deliberately revealing the truth to Big Daddy,' and how Williams uses this to characterise both men. More competent answers had a secure engagement with 'keeping secrets', usually in the context of deeply conservative values in 1950s American society and the illusionary 'perfect' family. Thematic approaches to the task often touched on 'appearance vs reality' and, more aptly, mendacity and truth, with some appropriate contextual points made about 'Southern values.' Stronger answers were more wide ranging in their approach, with Gooper and Mae as well as the Reverend Tooker all seen as 'hypocritical in the way they keep the secret of their desire for a share of Big Daddy's fortune,' as one learner argued. Answers at this level always considered Williams's dramatic methods – the setting of the bedroom, for example, showing how 'there could be no secrets in this family,' citing Mae's 'sneaking' and 'spying'. Some learners focused effectively on props, for example, Brick's crutch and the liquor cabinet, as 'metaphoric clues in relation to his hidden homosexual inclinations,' as one learner argued. Very strong answers analysed some of Williams's use of plastic theatre and very commonly his use of stage directions, 'which mean that there are no secrets from the audience and the actors,' as one learner suggested, 'because of Williams' auto-diegetic presence through narrative interjection.' Where such arguments were supported by close reference to the text and appropriate contextual points, the essays always did very well.

(b) This was the more popular choice on this text and nearly every answer had interesting points to discuss about the family party. Many candidates noted the significance of the birthday party setting as a 'celebration of life against the looming notion of Big Daddy's death,' as one learner put it, while others saw 'the family party setting as being presented as an outlet for the competition to win the inheritance,' as another leaner suggested. The extensive use of stage directions throughout the passage was used widely by nearly all learners as they engaged with Williams's methods, and more competent responses recognised it as 'part of his approach to characterisation and build-up of tension,' as one learner put it. More competent learners often found evidence for 'proving the Pollitt family is dysfunctional', as one essay suggested. For example, for one candidate, 'Gooper's snarky, mocking remark "Look at Brick put it down!" is an ill-disguised attempt to denigrate his favoured brother in front of both parents, especially,' the learner went on, 'considering Gooper's earlier attempt at bragging that he and Mae got the Hi-Fi with "three speakers" as a third anniversary gift for Brick and Maggie.' Stronger responses noted how dramatic irony is immediately established by Big Daddy's question directed to Rev. Tooker about 'this talk about memorials,' which some saw as 'clearly establishing the dark undertones of the party to celebrate BD's birthday.' Other strong responses analysed the characterisation in detail: Big Daddy was 'overbearing and dominating' (citing the stage direction '*Almost instant silence*') and 'blatantly rude as he jokes at Big Mama's expense.' She was seen sympathetically; 'her loudest laughs and attempts to "pick up or fuss with something" do not cover the hurt of her husband's mean-spirited comments,' as one leaner argued. There were some perceptive observations about the nuances of these stage directions, such as one candidate noting the significance of Big Daddy's instruction to silence the console gifted by Mae and Gooper, indicating his silencing of their attempts at winning his favour. Very good answers analysed some Williams's language and imagery choices. For example, 'the symbolism in Big Mama's black and white dress mimics the dramatic irony of the family party itself, a celebration of life for someone dying.' Other very good answers considered the animal imagery, often linking it to the wider text. The 'great aviary', for example, led some learners to Maggie's comment about 'sharing the same cage.' Discussing the effects of such connections was a hallmark of the strongest answers.

Section B: Poetry

Question 5

MAYA ANGELOU: *And Still I Rise*

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

(a) There were only a small number of responses seen to this question. Most learners chose relevant poems, with popular combinations being *Through the Inner City to the* Suburbs/*Still I Rise*, *My Arkansas*/*Woman Work* and *Country Lover*/*Remembrance.* Weaker responses summarised the content of the poems, often with only implicit awareness of the settings. Success at this level was determined by the comparison and how well it was developed. More competent answers had the settings as the main focus, often showing sound understanding of how the setting is an 'integral

part of how Angelou creates a mood in her poems,' as one learner suggested. At this level there was an appreciation that the setting 'might be implicit, as in *Still I Rise* where the slave farm is the base from which the resilience of the black community develops,' as one learner put it. Stronger answers explored the way Angelou uses settings to 'celebrate black culture and vitality,' though others, for example, analysed some of the details in *My Arkansas* that 'create the brooding and ominous tone through the red earth and the poplar trees,' as one essay noted. The most successful answers analysed Angelou's poetic methods in detail, showing how her choice of setting was 'integrated with the rhythms and language to create effects.' Answers at this level were confident in knowledge and understanding of the poems and were able to integrate comparisons, as well as appropriate contexts, into a seamless argument.

(b) Most answers had at least a basic knowledge and understanding of the poem. A few very weak responses struggled with some of the language and references and appeared to be writing about an unseen poem. More basic responses often paraphrased the poem, with successful responses at this level recognising it was 'about the black experience and poverty,' as one learner put it. Answers became straightforward as they offered some appreciation of Angelou's poetic methods, for example the 'chant-like quality of the rhythm,' and 'the musical, bluesy sounds,' as one learner noted. Competent answers developed such ideas into exploring the tone of the poem, variously considered defiant, threatening, hopeful and determined. This led some learners into considering Angelou's purposes in detail, with some good analysis of her use of the 'racist and sinister past to suggest a different sort of future,' as one learner summarised. Very good responses explored the contrasts between the 'musical and dance like qualities so typical of black culture and the destructive racist white attitudes,' as one leaner argued. At this level the full range of Angelou's poetic methods was analysed with apposite quotation and appropriate contextualisation. Where the essay also considered the effects of her poetic choices the answers did very well.

Question 6

SIMON ARMITAGE: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

This was the least popular poetry text in this session.

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

(b) There were only a small number of responses to this question. Most responses had at least a basic knowledge of the text and were able to give a broad context to the passage. Learners often saw the women as 'a way to test Gawain's virtue and reveal his flaws,' as one essay suggested, though others were concerned at the portrayal of the older lady 'as Gawain, in describing her with such vulgarity, lowers our expectations of him,' as one learner argued. More competent responses noted that the women 'are described from an omniscient viewpoint, through Gawain's eyes, implying the descriptions are what he thinks,' as one essay put it. Better answers were able to give a clear and precise context, explaining the significance of the women, in terms of their part in the narrative generally. The few stronger responses did look at some elements of Armitage's poetic methods such as 'the colour imagery and its connotations of purity and chastity, which will become rather ironic,' as one learner suggested. Others considered the language in detail, noting, for example, how 'the contrast between the descriptions of the two enhances the beauty of the Lord's wife, making Gawain's test all the more challenging.' Only a very few learners were confident enough to consider Armitage's alliterative verse and its complex rhythms, but these essays were very successful, especially if supported by integrated contextual references.

Question 7

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

This was a minority choice in this session with most learners offering the **(b)** passage option.

(a) There were only a small number of responses seen to this question. Nearly every response was able to select two relevant poems with which to address the task. Popular choices were *The Tyger*, *The Lamb*, *The Little Boy Lost*, *The Little Boy Found* and *The Shepherd*. Basic responses paraphrased their selected poems, often in detail, with success determined by how well the summaries were shaped to the demands of the task. At this level, God was a 'positive force, though His church and his ministers were not,' as one learner put it. More competent responses

selected poems that enabled them to contrast different sides of God's presentation, from the 'violent and strength of the tiger to the goodness and kindness of the shepherd,' as one learner summarised it. Essays at this level did better the more they could focus on Blake's style – his use of 'contrasting verse forms' and 'evocative language', for example. Stronger essays developed these points with close analysis that led to a careful consideration of the effects of the presentation. Where such responses included appropriate contextual references – Blake's attitudes to organised religion, for example – the answers did well.

(b) This was the more popular choice on this text. A few very weak answers approached it as an unseen, with only a generalised and restricted knowledge of the poem. More basic responses had appropriate knowledge and some understanding of the poem's meaning. Answers at this level tended to either paraphrase the poem or summarise some of Blake's concerns generally, notably the innocence of childhood and the 'wickedness of organised education,' as one learner styled it. More successful answers did look at some aspects of Blake's style, particularly the 'simple verse form, like a nursery rhyme,' and his use of the child's voice to 'create pathos,' as one essay suggested. Straightforward responses were able to develop such ideas by shaping them to the task, Blake's presentation, and supporting points with appropriate quotation. Competent answers focused on the detail of the poem, exploring the variety of Blake's concerns: nature, children, education, innocence and experience were popular discussion points. As these answers showed more confidence in considering Blake's style so they became more successful. For example, 'he presents a monologue through the voice on an 18th century English schoolboy who longs for the simplicity of childhood while struggling under a brutal and exploitative school system that strips him of joyfulness, youth and opportunity for genuine self-expression,' as one confident learner argued. Other strong responses noted 'Blake's powerful use of auditory diction and symbolic imagery' which reveals 'the disturbing and unjust experiences of the boy and the illusory nature of childhood,' and enables Blake to 'expose the lasting damage social institutions have.' Answers at this level consider a variety of poetic methods as well as imagery and verse form. Symbolism, especially the caged birds, and enjambement which in 'the final stanza shows desperation'. Answers which developed the analysis by considering the effects of Blake's choices did very well, especially where the points made were supported by appropriate quotations, links to the wider text and apposite contextualisation.

Question 8

Songs of Ourselves, Volume 2

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

(a) This was the less popular choice of question on *Songs of Ourselves, Volume 2*. Learners nearly always had at least a basic knowledge of their chosen poems on which to structure their answers. Popular pairings were *I hear an Army* with *Fears in Solitude*, *Father Returning Home* combined with *Australia 1970* or *The Hour is Come*. Particularly popular was *In the Park*. Weaker answers paraphrased the poems, though usually with at least a basic understanding of the type of 'suffering' involved. For some learners, 'suffering is the despair and pain of the soul that may be triggered by fear', whereas others saw that 'poets suffer from people becoming indifferent to war' or in relationships where 'they cannot change the outcomes, nor can they let go completely.' Where learners developed these points by considering some of the poetic methods, most often language and imagery, the answers became competent. At this level, there was a secure knowledge of the meaning of the poems, together with sound understanding of the poets' purposes. Stronger answers analysed a wider range of poetic methods such as the role of the speaker in the poem. Rhythm and rhyme were often well discussed and some confident responses considered structure and form, particularly the sonnet form and its various uses. Choosing contrasting poems helped some strong responses develop sophisticated arguments on how poets present emotions so that 'while this poet does not share suffering, but what caused their suffering,' another poet 'shows how suffering is a question of change, whether from within or from without,' as one learner argued. Such discussions were nearly always supported by apposite contextualisation, such as 'the fact that *In the Park* was originally published under a male pseudonym, Walter Lehmann, illustrating the argument that writing about female suffering even in 1961 was suppressed.' Such responses performed very well.

(b) This was the most popular poetry question on the paper, with answers seen at every level of the mark scheme. Weaker answers were not confident with the meaning of the poem, often ignoring the title and got very mixed up about rhyme schemes, many learners saying that the rhyme

scheme was irregular or erratic, for example. Basic answers often found this a very accessible poem and they maintained a clear focus on the presentation of mother and son, often summarising their story and showing empathy with the mother's (and the son's) situation. More straightforward responses offered varied interpretations on the mother's emotions and situations throughout its stages. For example, why the mother seemed 'small', somehow dwarfed by her husband's status or experience; why she was 'embarrassed' to admit in front of her son that she had ever been weak or felt less than; the fact that she was young and her husband was older than her own father and 'what this might mean emotionally and in terms of status in the world,' as one learner suggested. Competent answers looked at some of Hunt's poetic choices. Language was often well discussed, though learners disagreed about the implications of 'every other sort of name', with some seeing this as suggestive of fond and playful nicknames, whereas others saw signs of resentment and frustrations. Her formal inscription in the book was also variously interpreted as a 'mixture of suffering, love, admiration and perhaps even subservience,' as one learner summarised it. Stronger answers considered other poetic methods, with close attention often given to the rhyme scheme, which some learners placed a great deal of significance upon. Poetic structure was often more confidently analysed with 'the reversal of roles in the mother "guiding" him,' linked to the 'inevitable volta in the sonnet form,' as one learner noted. The sonnet form, and its 'romantic implications,' as one essay put it, was also well analysed, with many strong responses showing a perceptive grasp of form and structure. Strong answers also dealt with the implications of the title and its suggestions of devotion, suffering, or self-sacrifice, with some learners developing sophisticated interpretations of her role as mother and wife. A particular crux point was the final couplet, which all but the strongest responses found challenging, as Hunt 'changes the focus from mother to son yet links the speaker to the father in a convoluted logic,' as one learner argued. Where such interpretations were developed analytically and with appropriate textual pointing, 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 make a general comment on performance on either question.

Question 10

Stories of Ourselves, Volume 1

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

Question 11

EVELYN WAUGH: *A Handful of Dust*

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

Question 12

COLSON WHITEHEAD: *The Underground Railroad*

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

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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

Key messages

1. Learners should show evidence of literary analysis in discursive option **(a)** essays, as well as in passage-based option **(b)** questions.
2. Essays should include some form of contextualisation to support the learner's arguments.

General comments

This session, once again, responses were seen at every level of assessment, with some learners reaching the highest level on nearly every text on the paper. Some scripts were disadvantaged by rubric errors, most often because the learner had attempted more than the stipulated two questions or had answered two questions from the same section. Only a very few learners appeared to have time problems, causing the second essay to be either rushed or incomplete. The vast majority of learners followed the rubric accurately and with a clear balance between the two answers. The standard of written English was also at least satisfactory with all but a few learners adopting an appropriate style and register. Nearly every candidate was able to show at least a basic knowledge and understanding of two texts and many learners showed evidence of a real engagement with and enjoyment of them.

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

1. Assessment Objective 2 from the Literature in English syllabus states that learners should 'analyse ways in which writers' choices of language, form and structure shape meanings and effects.' Learners attempting option **(b)** passage questions often showed evidence of meeting this Assessment Objective in their responses to the given passage. However, learners attempting option **(a)** questions, the discursive essay, also need to provide evidence that they are able to do this, by quoting or referring closely to specific moments in the text and considering the dramatic or poetic methods chosen by the writer. Learners may then explore the effects of those choices, showing how they support the arguments in their essays in response to the specific question.

2. Learners responding to option **(b)** passage questions, who are able to briefly place the passage within the wider work it is selected from, often write more focused and relevant answers. This is often, and possibly best, done at the start of the essay. With drama passages, learners should consider the significance of the passage to the play as a whole – this might be in terms of characterisation, plot or important revelations. In poetry answers, the context might be some aspect of the background to the poem, possibly biographical or historical, which is important to the learner's interpretation. Learners should be encouraged to consider this approach, as it will give a context to their interpretation of the passage itself, as well as providing evidence of knowledge of the text.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Drama

Question 1

ERROL JOHN: *Moon on a Rainbow Shawl*

This was a minority choice of text in this session, with almost all of the few learners who chose it opting for the **(b)** passage question.

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

(b)   The few learners who chose this question nearly always had at least a basic knowledge and understanding of the text with which to consider the significance of the extract. Most answers focused on the characters, particularly the boy, 'as a reminder of what Charlie might have been,' as one essay put it, Sophia, 'dressed to deal with authority' and Esther. Those learners who knew the situation and what Charlie had done were able to discuss the irony of the job offer at this point in the play, as well as analyse the contrasting responses of Esther and Sophia. Very few answers considered John's dramatic methods in detail but those that were aware of the dramatic action and the interplay of contrasting attitudes were able to discuss the extract competently.

Question 2

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Measure for Measure*

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

(a)   Weaker responses tended to retell all that they knew about the Duke and Isabella, with only intermittent reference to their relationship. More basic responses summarised the relationship, often in detail, focusing on their characters and 'how they develop until the very end when the Duke pops the question to her,' as one learner summarised it. More straightforward responses considered the effect they have on each other. For example: 'Isabella becoming more human in her rage against Angelo and manipulation of Mariana,' and the Duke 'more understanding of human behaviour, as he, like Angelo, falls for Isabella.' Competent answers linked the relationship to Shakespeare's concerns in the play as it 'incorporates another facet of justice and creates tension for an audience'. Their role in the plot of the play was often discussed at this level. 'The premise of the play is Isabella pleading Claudio's innocence, so the master manipulator uses a range of tactics to assist her,' as one learner put it. Stronger answers discussed the significance of 'his disguise as a friar and her intention to become a nun,' in terms of the play's presentation of religion, but some learners considered this a key effect in the play as the Duke is 'duplicitous in his disguise and therefore complicates the notion of her seeking justice'. The most successful answers explored Shakespeare's presentation in detail. Language, disguise, action and costume were all popular discussion points – 'He is dressed as a friar and she as a nun,' as one learner reminded us. Where these arguments were supported by reference to the text and some awareness of appropriate contexts, the answers did well.

(b)   Nearly every learner was aware of the context to this passage and why Claudio is under arrest. Weaker answers summarised what happens to Claudio in the play at length, often including Isabella's part, with a consequent lack of focus on the detail of this passage. More basic answers responded personally to Claudio's situation and the perceived 'unfairness of his execution because his fiancée is pregnant,' as one learner noted. Most learners had sympathy with Claudio as he is 'logical and accepting of his guilt,' though others thought him 'a wise person who has just made a mistake' concluding that 'it's hard not to sympathise with him,' according to one. More competent answers considered his language, the role of Lucio as a 'comic counterpoint', undermining the seriousness of the situation, and Claudio's faith in his sister. The importance to the plot of his request for her help was well recognised and discussed, with some noting 'the accuracy of his description of her effect on men, showing how well he knows his sister,' as one essay argued. His summary of Angelo's rationale is 'logical and thoughtful,' as one essay noted. Stronger answers analysed Shakespeare's choices of language and imagery. For example, the repetition of "liberty" highlighting 'the negative outcomes from too much of it' and 'the "thirsty evil" as personification, showing temptation is always there, as Angelo is about to discover,' as one learner suggested.

Answers at this level considered tone, noting how 'Lucio's ironic comments undermine Claudio's seriousness,' though many saw Claudio's language as suggesting he is 'regretful and ashamed,' and that 'his animalistic imagery of the sexual nature in the "rats" shows his awareness of his fault, unlike Lucio who abandoned someone he impregnated,' as one learner argued. Answers at this level were confident in their knowledge and understanding of the play and well able to explore the significance of the extract to Claudio's characterisation and to the development of the play in general.

Question 3

JOHN WEBSTER: *The Duchess of Malfi*

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

Question 4

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

This was the most popular drama text in this session, with the majority of learners choosing the **(b)** passage question.

(a) Nearly every learner was able to select relevant material from the play with which to address the question. Weaker answers summarised each of the family units in turn, generally focusing on Big Mama and Big Daddy's 'unfair responses to Gooper and Brick,' as one learner suggested. Others at this level summarised Gooper and Mae and their treatment of 'the no-neck monsters, who are seen in material terms, such as Gooper's ticket to the ranch,' as one learner wrote. More competent responses were able to contrast the different responses, especially Mae's 'constantly thrusting her children to the forefront,' with Maggie's evident 'dislike of her children, but desperation to have one with Brick,' as one essay argued. Other sound interpretations noted that in 'a play about inheritance, the children, grown-ups and infants, are central to the plot,' with nearly every answer discussing the conflicts created by the different perspectives, 'from Big Daddy's slap to Maggie's bow and arrows and Gooper's jealousy of his younger brother,' as one essay summarised it. The favouring of Brick by his parents and its effects on Gooper and Mae were well explored in essays at this level, with some understanding of Williams's concerns leading to some answers usefully exploring the biographical contexts. Strong answers recognised Williams's dramatic methods and how he uses the different attitudes to create the conflict, in the family, but also internally in characters like Maggie. Language was well analysed at this level, often contrasting Big Mama's baby talk to Brick with 'Mae's ruthless but ultimately heartless parenting,' as one learner noted. In strong answers, points were always supported by relevant quotation and appreciation of appropriate contexts.

(b) This was the most popular drama question on the paper. Nearly every response had at least a basic knowledge of the text and some understanding of the significance of this extract. Weaker answers either summarised the relationship throughout the play with only intermittent focus on the extract or paraphrased the events in the extract, interlaced with personal response to the characters, particularly Maggie's desperation for Brick's attention and his 'determination to keep her at arm's length,' as one learner suggested. More competent responses saw that this exchange 'sets the scene for the audience's introduction to their relationship,' which for some 'showed that Maggie's insistent longing for Brick's approval makes her delusional towards her reality,' as one essay argued. At this level, learners had a sound appreciation of Williams's dramatic methods. The significance of the setting was a popular discussion point, as it is 'the room/cage where all conflicts of the play unfold,' and 'it suffocates their ability to communicate,' as one learner wrote. Stronger answers developed this by considering the lack of privacy, who had slept in the bedroom previously and the symbolic nature of the 'lack of sexual activity in this place,' as one essay noted. The naturalistic elements and Williams's use of plastic theatre were often analysed well in stronger responses – the locking of the door, Brick's crutch, the use of alcohol, and 'her frenetic movements set against his stillness,' as one learner suggested. Learners offered a wide range of different interpretations of the relationship, with those who explored it from Maggie's perspective answering the question more directly. Some learners were sympathetic to her desperation, though those who remembered her 'liaison with Skipper,' tended to see her guilt in her language and actions. For some learners: 'They each desire to be loved but are unable to be loved by one another,' though others saw her anxiety as more 'rooted in her fear of being rejected and therefore impoverished.'

Answers which supported such arguments with relevant quotation, brief references to the wider text and some awareness of contexts 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 nearly all learners opting for the **(b)** passage question.

(a) There were only a very few responses seen to this question. Most learners had at least a basic knowledge of two poems on which to base their response, though there was a wide range of poems chosen. Weaker responses summarised the poems and offered personal responses as to why they were emotional. Better answers chose contrasting poems such as *Phenomenal Woman* and *A Kind of Love*, which helped them to develop a more nuanced response to Angelou's concerns. More competent answers had some comments on Angelou's poetic style, noting, for example, that 'the more emotional poems were often written in the first person,' as one suggested. Other responses noted how 'she uses racist imagery and tropes from the Black American counterculture to express both rage and hope,' as one learner argued. The stronger answers looked more closely at language and imagery, though other poetic methods were not considered. The strongest responses were confident in knowledge and understanding of the text and of Angelou's concerns, often using context to explain why the poems were so emotionally charged.

(b) This was a popular choice with most learners having at least a basic knowledge of the poem's meaning and some understanding of Angelou's purposes. A few weaker answers were generalised in their comments, suggesting they were approaching the poem as an unseen, but the large majority of responses were engaged in his story: 'Willie is presented as the living embodiment of hope, persevering through pain to ultimately inspire children and the world that being alive is inspiring, even in the face of defeat,' as one learner neatly summarised it. More competent responses considered Angelou's methods in detail. Language, tone and imagery were often well discussed and as learners considered other poetic features, such as the rhythm and the use of a changing voice, so did the essays become more successful. For example, one learner suggested that 'he rises with the pattern of the syllables and all new grown life holds a part of Willie'. For others, the 'change in voice, giving a new perspective, allows him to offer his own story and become more powerful.' Angelou's use of repetition, the language of pain and suffering and some 'loaded words of a racist past' were often well discussed, though only the strongest essays discussed her use of rhyme and rhythm with any degree of confidence. The strongest essays discussed the poem in the light of Angelou's wider concerns, often supporting points with apposite contextual references and perceptive links to the wider text.

Question 6

SIMON ARMITAGE: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

This was a relatively popular choice, though nearly every answer was on the **(b)** passage option.

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

(b) This was the second most popular choice of poetry question in this session. Most learners had at least a basic knowledge and understanding of the text on which to structure their response, though learners who could place the extract in the appropriate textual context tended to do better. Weaker answers tended to summarise the complete relationship between Gawain and the Lady, often focusing on the reveal at the end of the tale. This led to a lack of focus on the detail on the passage and limited the success of the responses. More straightforward responses did work through the 'cut and thrust of this dialogue,' as one learner styled it, recognising the 'challenges from the lady to Gawain's sense of honour and chivalry,' as one learner summarised it. Nearly every response recognised it as 'a form of seduction, aimed at weakening Gawain's guard.' This was developed by more competent responses who often considered it 'questionable behaviour from the lady,' leading to contextual discussions of infidelity, chivalry and honour in that era. Some learners thought that 'while Gawain shows restraint, he is weakened in the eyes of the reader' and that 'the scene has all

the hallmarks of a set-up, with the bedroom bolt offering a sense of entrapment' as one strong response argued. Other interpretations saw the irony of 'the paradox of good faith.' Stronger answers considered Armitage's presentation, linking this passage to the wider text through the imagery of 'hunting' and often referring to the 'wager' between Gawain and the Host. For other learners 'the repetition of honour throughout precisely describes Gawain's determination to uphold a strong and admirable reputation,' as one learner wrote, developed in some responses to seeing his words 'not nearly such a noble knight' as both ironic and comedic. Stronger answers explored the language, for example 'Armitage uses positive diction for her, to emphasise the temptation to Gawain,' as well as noting her sexual innuendos and 'almost aggressive suggestiveness'. Only a few responses were confident in exploring Armitage's use of alliterative verse and 'rhythmic cadences to highlight the temptations,' as one neatly put it. Where such points were supported by text and context the responses did very well.

Question 7

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

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

Question 8

Songs of Ourselves, Volume 2

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

(b)   This was the third most popular poetry question in this session. Nearly every learner had at least a basic knowledge of the meaning of the poem with which to address the task. Most essays thought Tollet 'presents the unwavering and unconditional love the speaker is willing to give' which is 'successful in invoking admiration in the reader towards the speaker in their ability to have so much love for one person,' as one essay summarised it. More straightforward answers noted how 'Tollet is showing the speaker's support, dedication and loyalty by listing the hardships,' as one learner expressed it. Answers at this level often had personal engagement with the speaker and offered a personal response to some of Tollet's examples of suffering. More competent responses considered some of the poetic methods. For example, the word suffer is 'used as descriptive and yet also as irony,' or 'eternal snow' as symbolic of the lengths to which the speaker will go. Stronger answers picked up on some of the 'archaic' language such as 'thee' and 'thy' and explored the way Tollet uses nature to suggest 'the speaker's purity and innocence, as well as her determination,' as one essay argued. Stronger responses also considered a wider range of poetic methods, such as the use of rhyme, the imagery of hunting, and the use of alliteration to 'enhance the mood of selfless devotion.' There were few attempts to consider the rhythmic sophistication of Tollet's verse, but this was a feature of the most successful responses. Nearly all of the responses thought the poem 'reflects the idea that the love is continuous and without breaks or cracks in their dedication,' and those who analysed those features in Tollet's verse did very well.

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 performance on either question.

Question 10

Stories of Ourselves, Volume 1

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

Question 11

EVELYN WAUGH: *A Handful of Dust*

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

Question 12

COLSON WHITEHEAD: *The Underground Railroad*

There were only a few responses to this text; the vast majority of which chose the **(b)** passage option.

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

(b) The few responses seen to this question had at least a basic knowledge and understanding of the text and showed some personal engagement with Cora's situation. Weaker answers tended to summarise what had happened to Cora previously, often with personal responses to 'the injustice of racial violence,' as one learner put it. Other responses at this level tended to assert points about Cora's situation and future events with too little focus on the passage itself. More competent essays considered the women, how they were treating Cora and often speculated as to the motivations. At this level there was some appreciation of Whitehead's narrative methods, most often the language and imagery. Stronger answers considered the narrative structure, analysing for example how 'Whitehead continuously shifts the focus from woman to woman, while always keeping Cora in the foreground,' as one essay noted. More successful answers confidently analysed Whitehead's use of 'variable sentence structures,' 'the rhythms of the speech and dialects,' and 'a journalistic tone that emphasised the ordinariness of what happened to Cora and the women's matter of fact acceptance of it,' as one neatly summarised it. Such responses often made apposite links with the wider text and supported their points with appropriate quotation and contextual references.