

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 2010/12
Poetry and Prose

Key messages

In successful responses, candidates:

- Address the question that has been set.
- Integrate relevant textual references to support their ideas.
- Analyse sensitively ways in which writers achieve their effects.
- Write informed personal responses to texts.
- Explore aspects of a writer's use of form.

In less successful responses, candidates:

- Work through 'themes' they have studied without a clear focus on the question.
- Have only a basic grasp of surface meanings.
- Make assertions rather than analysing specific effects of the writing.
- Log features of the writing without analysing them.
- Show a limited awareness of form, sometimes using the terms 'play', 'novel' and 'poem' interchangeably.

General comments

There was much evidence of assured work this session where candidates showed insight in their informed and sensitive personal responses to texts and in addressing the key words in questions. Some poetry responses were very long at the expense of prose answers, leading to an unequal performance across the paper. Some candidates scored highly for their poetry answer since they were able to refer to details in the poems printed on the paper but wrote less successfully in their prose answers where they had an insufficient range of textual references they needed for support and analysis of the writing. Several candidates directed Examiners to specific line numbers alongside the poems and printed extracts rather than using direct and focused quotations to support the points they were making.

Focus on the question

The most successful answers sustained a clear focus on the key words of the question, selecting relevant material. Some answers offered a clear understanding of the text but without achieving a clear focus. Some candidates drifted from the focus of the question by writing about themes they had revised for the exam. In answers to poetry or extract questions, many candidates simply worked through the printed text in an explanatory way without addressing the question. Candidates should be reminded that questions are not simply invitations to write all they know about a particular character, theme or setting.

Understanding of the text and writers' effects

The most confident answers showed an extensive knowledge of the text and its distinctive form, with candidates integrating concise textual references to support their ideas. For poetry and extract-based questions, candidates selected relevant material printed with the question and explored it closely, and this led to careful analysis of ways in which writers achieve their effects. For general essays, the more successful responses showed evidence of candidates having learned much apt direct quotation to support their ideas, and this enabled them to analyse specific ways in which writers achieve their effects. Less successful responses lacked a sufficient range of reference and, consequently, were overly assertive or, in the least successful responses, simply descriptive.

Less successful responses to poetry merely logged features such as enjambment, caesura and ABAB rhyme schemes without close analysis of *precise* ways in which poets use these devices to create *specific* effects. Some candidates referred to 'semantic fields', listing words or phrases rather than probing the specific effects they created. Several responses focused on analysis of structure, form and language in isolation without relating this to the writer's ideas.

Informed personal responses

The strongest answers explored with perception a wide range of relevant detail from the texts. Less successful responses offered personal interpretations that were overly assertive and often not adequately rooted in, nor supported by, the detail of the text. Some candidates offered their own views on topics such as love, death and grief; this is not required.

Some candidates began their answers with general introductions that did not address the question often deploying extraneous context material; in such cases, the start of an answer to the actual question was delayed until the second paragraph. Some ended their answers by repeating, sometimes at length, points already made within the main body of the answer. There is neither merit nor reward in this approach.

Several Examiners commented on handwriting that was difficult to decipher. Candidates should be reminded that legible handwriting is an important first stage in communicating with the person reading their responses.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

Most candidates acknowledged how deeply moving the poem is by discussing the father's inability to accept his wife's death, how his everyday life/routine still revolves around her and how the speaker's incredulity towards his father's grief is mirrored by his own actions in the final stanza. The most successful responses explored details that create pathos, looking at the possible implications of love being 'raw' and the reference to 'warmth'. Several explored the connotations of 'disconnected' and the title of the poem. Some wrote that it represented the distance between father and son, caused by their differing responses to the mother's death, and some who focused on the image of the disconnected phone, pointed to the distance between life and death. Some responses commented on societal expectations about men dealing with grief, though often in an overly assertive way. Less successful answers showed an understanding of the pain of grief but tended to summarise or re-tell the content of the poem. Many of the less successful responses did not look at specific ways in which language choices create effects.

Question 2

Many candidates explored both amusing and serious elements of the poem and focused consistently on the question. More successful responses argued that Wright treats serious subjects in a comic manner. For example, the phrase in parenthesis ('which luckily later caught him on his way') imparts the dramatic rescue almost as a casual afterthought; and the description of the second son 'balanced on a small ice-floe' presents a comical picture of a small child perhaps perceiving his escapade as a game, oblivious to the threat. The strongest responses reflected on the idea of an attitude as a gift and grasped the humour of the unsuitably petticoat-clad daughter saving her brother by sticking out 'an alpenstock' and of the mother maintaining a calm attitude as she sketches the scene. The reference to 'petticoats' sometimes led to generalised comment about the subjugation of women 'in those days'. Less successful responses missed the writer's use of humour and irony and needed a more confident grasp of the detail of the poem.

Question 3

In most answers there was an understanding of the speaker's lamenting of his unrequited and lost love, his having no remedy but to continue his life alone. Only the most assured answers were able to explore the implications of the object of the speaker's desire being cast as cruel and heartless for not returning his affection. The speaker was variously judged to be sympathetic, self-pitying and obsessive. One candidate wrote that the poem expresses an inherently male perspective and experience. The strongest responses integrated well-selected textual reference to support their interpretations and analysed closely ways in which Swinburne achieves his effects. Less successful responses worked their way through the poem in a narrative

fashion without addressing the key words 'memorably convey'. There were many references to rhyme schemes that lacked specific, convincing detail to support the general points made.

Question 4

Most candidates were able to discuss the dream as a metaphor for the speaker's troubled thoughts and feelings, and most were able to relate this to the final stanza and his sense of abandonment. Most responses focused on the impressions of the army, the effects of the dream on the speaker, and the seemingly relentless nature of the dream. Most interpreted the army as an extended metaphor rather than a literal invasion. Many candidates reflected on the surreal nature of the lurid green hair, though some commented unproductively in general terms on the colour being symbolic of youth and nature. Less successful responses were narrative or overly assertive, sometimes including pre-learned generalised comment on structure and form, without either reference to specific detail in the poem or to the specific requirements of the question.

Question 5

Successful responses commented on the powerful depiction of the man's strength in handling a heavy and unwieldy animal, his professionalism and expertise ('suddenly savage, suddenly gentle'), and his absorption in the task. There was much perceptive analysis of the impact of visual imagery and of the hyphenated words (such as 'flame-crimson'). The strongest responses addressed consistently the key words 'powerfully portray'; some responses narrowed the focus to the power of the sheep-shearer. Less successful responses worked through the poem adopting a narrative or overly assertive approach. A few candidates misread the reference to 'collier' and wrote instead about 'collies'.

Question 6

The most convincing responses focused on the speaker's 'thoughts and feelings', and how Hughes makes them 'so disturbing'. They explored the speaker's bitterness towards the person being addressed and his criticism of that person's jealousy towards the person referred to as 'she' throughout the poem. In these successful responses, there was a sustained critical analysis of the speaker's relentlessly harsh tone and the significance of the imagery relating to 'vacuum' and 'crossed-out page'. Stronger responses focused on specific details in the poem and tailored their material to the key words of the question. Less successful responses focused on context rather than exploring the details of the text itself, with general comments about Sylvia Plath and Assia Wevill and assertions about Hughes' attitude towards them and women in general, with little supporting reference from the poem.

Section B

Question 7

Most answers showed at least some understanding of the character, a friendly and well-liked priest, and most candidates commented on how at home he is with the family, engaging with the individual interests of the children. Many answers explored the descriptions of the 'whiff of an earthy cologne' and the 'boyish man' and how Adichie uses them to present his character. The more successful responses were able to place this moment in the wider context of the novel and to consider the significance of this moment which introduces Father Amadi to readers. These responses understood that impressions of the character are gleaned from Kambili's perspective. Candidates compared the different attitudes towards religion held by this young priest and older characters such as Papa Eugene and Father Benedict. Less successful responses drifted too far from the question, working through the extract commenting on Kambili's thoughts and feelings rather than tailoring their material to the demands of the question.

Question 8

Most candidates appreciated Jaja's courage and growing defiance towards his father and the constraints of family life: some noted the significance of the visit to Nsukka and Aunty Ifeoma's encouragement to Jaja to resemble his namesake. There were some sensitive responses to this question, offering a wide coverage of suitable references and a perceptive understanding of the character. The strongest responses drew upon a comprehensive range of references, including much direct quotation, which allowed candidates to analyse closely aspects of Adichie's writing and to give convincing reasons for admiring Jaja. In responses with an insufficiently wide range of reference, candidates were overly dependent on assertion. The least successful responses included summaries of key moments in a descriptive way, lacking specific textual detail for support.

Question 9

Many answers showed an understanding of the dramatic nature of Magwitch's slow revelation of his knowledge of Pip's circumstances. The more successful responses explored the suddenness of Pip's realisation ('the truth...came flashing on me') and the consequences as Pip sees them ('disappointments, dangers, disgraces'). The strongest responses wrote sensitively about this encounter between Pip and Magwitch and made judicious links to the rest of the novel to illuminate the points they made about this 'dramatic and significant moment in the novel'. They analysed closely ways in which Dickens conveys Magwitch's sense of theatre and his enjoyment in his revelation, in contrast to Pip's 'abhorrence'. Pip's stunned silence and inarticulacy, enabling Magwitch to dominate the encounter, were also discussed. Less successful responses worked through the extract describing the encounter without addressing the key words of the question.

Question 10

Many responses included references to Estella's appalling treatment of Pip during his first visit to Satis House, her indoctrination by Miss Havisham, her marriage to Drummle, his abusive treatment of her, and her final conversation with Pip. There was a general understanding that Estella is a direct result of what Miss Havisham makes her, as a device to exact revenge on men. Stronger responses saw Miss Havisham's stealing her heart and putting ice in its place as an admission that it is taken from Estella without her consent, her repentance a clear indication of sins against Estella. Less successful responses offered character sketches without exploring Dickens's presentation of the character and reasons for sympathy (or otherwise). These general responses often lacked relevant support and did not consider the complexities of the character's portrayal.

Question 11

Most candidates understood the context of the moment within the wider novel: the boat in which Rebecca died has been discovered and both Maxim and the narrator have no idea about what is going to happen next. The more successful responses focused on the change in power dynamics of the relationship between the narrator and Maxim, often describing this as a role reversal, with Maxim now seeming uncertain and the narrator forceful and firm. The strongest responses addressed the key word 'tense', exploring the nature of silence within this extract and how it contributes to the tension. There was also analysis of the tension created by Rebecca's haunting presence and its enormous impact on Maxim and by what some regarded as a breakdown in trust between narrator and reader, citing what they regarded as the immorality of the narrator's lack of concern about the murder itself. Less successful responses made general observations about 'gothic', wrote a narrative account of the extract without addressing the question or were not sure about which character is speaking.

Question 12

In most responses, there was an understanding of key character traits of Rebecca, with references to her affairs, her cruelty, her manipulation of others and her firm hold over Manderley. Only the strongest responses explored du Maurier's use of form, notably the use of a retrospective first person narrator whose reliability might be questioned as someone biased and blinded by love for Maxim. One candidate wrote that the narrator and Maxim have a vested interest in depicting Rebecca as a villain. Less successful responses offered straightforward comments in basic character sketches. Those who restricted their references to the extract printed in **Question 11** adopted a self-limiting approach because of the narrow scope of their answers.

Question 13

Most responses revealed an understanding of Gogol's thought and feelings as depicted in the extract, and many candidates were able to make relevant links to other parts of the novel. They commented on Gogol's eagerness to change his name, the urge to tell strangers he is now 'Nikhil' and his guilt that he is 'overstepping' his parents. The more successful responses sustained a clear focus on the question and selected relevant material for analysis of Lahiri's writing, exploring the impact of the event being described as 'unmomentous'. Less successful responses worked through the extract, tracing Gogol's thoughts and feelings, often in a descriptive rather than analytical way, without addressing the key words 'strikingly convey'.

Question 14

Most candidates understood key details about the marriage between Ashoke and Ashima, for example, the circumstances leading up to their arranged marriage, their support for each other, her dependence on him and the impact on her of Ashoke's death. The more successful responses commented on their determination keep their Bengali heritage alive, the difficulties of their early life in America and the impact on their marriage when Ashoke works away from home. The strongest answers used a wide range of direct quotation both to support their ideas and to analyse features of the writing. Less successful responses were overly dependent on narrative and assertion, often within a narrow scope of reference.

Question 15

In many responses, there was an awareness of the wider context, that the girls are taking revenge on Irma, who is prettier and richer than they are. More successful responses explored Lindsay's presentation of the girls' hysteria, uncontrollable and dangerous, and Dianne's sudden power and unexpected physical strength in coming to the rescue of Irma. Her slap on Edith's cheek is all that can quell the hysteria. The strongest responses explored the exaggerated initial description of the scene to the French Revolution and the animalistic and grotesque descriptions of the girls and the dramatic impact of the slap across Edith's cheek. Less successful responses worked through the extract, explaining what is happening, sometimes with an imperfect understanding of who the characters are and which character is speaking.

Question 16

Of the few answers seen, the strongest ones picked up on class differences, the nature of masculinity and friendship, the humour and Albert's significance within the plot. Candidates focused on his relationships with Mike and Irma and on the value placed on him by the Colonel. They commented on his difficult start in life and his modestly accepting the cheque from the Leopold family and spending the money wisely. The least successful responses had an insufficient range of references to be able respond adequately to ways in which Lindsay makes him such a memorable character.

Question 17

The deterioration of Pi and Richard Parker and the fear of going blind after all their other trials were understood by most candidates. Pi's caring nature, respect for animals and selflessness were mentioned. Most found particularly moving Pi's acceptance of death as inevitable. The more successful responses explored the impact of Pi's moving address to his family and statement to God, the depiction of his inner struggles with external forces, and the way in which Martel conveys this new sense of hopelessness. Only a few answers mentioned the dramatic nature of the cliff-hanger at the end of the extract. The least successful responses worked through the extract re-telling its content without exploring specific ways in which Martel makes the moment 'both moving and dramatic'.

Question 18

Of the few answers seen, the strongest ones focused on Pi's resilience, optimism and empathy conveyed effectively through first person narrative voice. These answers explored his integrity towards three religions, the effects of losing family, his affection for Richard Parker and his utter heroism for surviving so long on the lifeboat. Other responses lacked a sufficient range of relevant references with which to address the question.

Question 19

Most candidates showed at least some understanding of the extract and its position within the wider novel. The more successful responses used relevant supporting reference to comment on the sense of anarchy, danger, panic and, ultimately, societal collapse. There was perceptive analysis of hysterical humans fighting like animals and the descent into savagery, even in a supposedly civilised country. There was comment on how shocking it is that those who should be protecting the people are now being violent towards them. In the strongest responses, candidates commented on the implications in the collapse of transport and infrastructure and specific ways in which Wells captures the chaos and panic. Some candidates attempted to draw a parallel between the Martian invasion and British colonial oppression in other lands, though this was often overly assertive and led to an inconsistent focus on the question. Less successful responses re-told the events in the extract without focusing on the ways in which Wells 'powerfully conveys panic'. Other responses focused on only a narrow section of the extract.

Question 20

There were too few responses seen to make meaningful comment.

Question 21

Many answers focused on the mystery of Dr Heidegger, his highly suspicious past and the curious nature of the experiment he proposes. The more successful responses explored the portrayal of his friends: their age, disreputableness and rumours surrounding them. These responses were alert to Hawthorne's use of irony. They analysed the presentation of the setting, with references to the skeleton rattling in its closet, the painting of his fiancée and the implications about magic and the supernatural. The strongest responses sustained a focus on the key words 'intriguing opening'. Less successful responses offered a narrative rather than analytical response to the question, working their way through the extract without an effective selection of appropriate material. Some labelled aspects of the extract as 'gothic' without developing their points or making them relevant to the question.

Question 22

Of the few answers seen, the stronger ones showed understanding of the children's lack of affection for their mother and of the purely practical and mercenary nature of the arrangement they propose for her future. The strongest responses explored the detached tone of the discussions, the depiction of the widow's forcefulness and the themes of greed and family values. Stereotypes associated with the word 'widow' were considered alongside the subversion of those stereotypes within the story. Less successful responses retold some events from the story with a limited range of references.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 2010/13
Poetry and Prose

There were too few candidates for a meaningful report to be produced.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 2010/22

Drama

Key messages

- The most successful responses addressed the key terms of the question in the introductory paragraph, remained focused and supported ideas with concise quotations which were analysed fully.
- Beginning a response with lengthy comments on the writer's life, works and times, giving plot summaries or listing the writer's techniques to be addressed are unproductive ways to start an essay. Conclusions need to be more than a reiteration of points.
- Commenting on quotations and punctuation, chosen at random, without exploring the context and linking it to the question, is unlikely to achieve reward.
- An awareness of the text as drama and a personal engagement with the impact of the play onstage are essential in successful responses.

General comments

Many candidates demonstrated knowledge and enjoyment of their set texts and an engagement with the characters, ideas and themes they contain. The most successful responses showed detailed appreciation of texts, were aware of the text as performance and commented on stagecraft, mood and tone, as well as the dramatic impact writers achieved. It was pleasing to see that the new set texts, *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *A Midsummer's Night Dream* were popular choices though the most popular text, across all components, was *Othello*. There were far fewer responses seen to both *Death and the King's Horseman* and *Crumbs from the Table of Joy*. Centres are reminded that *Othello* and *Crumbs from the Table of Joy* will be replaced on the syllabus in 2025 by Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* and *A Taste of Honey* by Shelagh Delaney.

Some candidates wrote lengthy introductions of extraneous information, or plot summaries, before referring to the question. In some cases, the actual terms of the chosen question were completely missed resulting in a retelling of the plot or passage. With 45 minutes per essay, candidates should use the time wisely and begin to answer the question immediately. There is no requirement for them to write a thesis statement or to retell the plot before answering the specific question. In passage-based questions, a brief introduction, contextualising the passage, is a helpful way to start an answer. It is also helpful for candidates to write a sentence or two referencing the question and giving a brief overview of the key points before going on to develop them in the main body of the essay. Too often, candidates took a linear approach, working through the passage, explaining what was happening, and often failing to reach the end where key points may have been missed. Textual references which were selected were often over-analysed, resulting in responses which were narrow in range with limited coverage of the passage or text. Listing literary features as a way in which a passage was, for example, 'powerful' or 'shocking', is also an unproductive way to start a response. The selection of the most relevant material and issues to be discussed is an important skill; simply working through a passage or the text, without focus on the terms of the question is unlikely to achieve high reward.

An awareness that these texts are written to be performed onstage informed the most successful answers. They were aware that, although stage directions inform an actor's performance, an audience is not a reader, so commenting on the punctuation in the stage directions rather than the tone and mood created seems unproductive. The most successful responses demonstrated a constant awareness of the text as performance, referring to the 'audience' rather than 'reader' and the 'play' rather than 'novel', 'text' or 'book'. These were able to explore stagecraft and the authors' methods to convey the main concerns of their chosen texts and to outline their own, or propose other audience members', responses.

In discursive questions, the most successful answers covered a range of material from the whole text, supporting points with quotation or very specific textual reference. The ability to integrate brief, well-selected reference to the text is a key discriminator as indicated in the Level Descriptors. Candidates who memorise direct quotations are likely to be better prepared to analyse the ways in which writers achieve their effects

(AO3). However, these should be fully explored rather than remain inert or used to support a narrative approach. Similarly, beginning a paragraph with a reference or quotation rather than supporting a point does little to develop an argument effectively.

The ability to analyse linguistic and dramatic effects is key to successful responses. Whilst some candidates understood and used literary terminology correctly, for example, foreshadowing and dramatic irony, there remains the tendency to point out terms that are not helpful in developing an argument constructively. Simply asserting the playwright uses a technique is unlikely to be rewarded; techniques identified should be relevant, supported, and the effects achieved analysed. Candidates often refer to punctuation – exclamation marks, capital letters, dashes – while seeking to comment on dialogue but without the context which is unhelpful. These can be relevant, and important, but only if related to the ideas conveyed in the text. Candidates should avoid stating the obvious, for example, the writer uses 'diction' or 'vocabulary' and should focus on analysing specific language and the effects achieved.

On Paper 2, all but a few candidates were clear about the exam requirement and answered one passage-based question and one discursive. The few rubric infringements seen were where candidates answered two passage-based questions. In this case, both essays were marked but only the higher mark awarded. There were many lengthy responses to the first essay resulting in some candidates running out of time on the second essay: an equal amount of time should be spent on both answers if candidates are to achieve marks in the higher levels, where well-developed and sustained responses are required to meet the marking criteria. Candidates are reminded not to refer to line numbers instead of quoting from the text and to remember to label their answers clearly with the question number at the top of the response.

Handwriting was observed to have deteriorated and at times obscured meaning: candidates should endeavour to write legibly and to avoid numerous crossings out which often resulted in a loss of clarity in expression.

Comments on specific questions

LYNN NOTTAGE: *Crumbs from the Table of Joy*

Question 1

(a) This was the most popular of the Nottage questions. The most successful answers started by commenting that Ernestine was the narrator in the extract, understanding her breaking the fourth wall and creating a bond between her and the audience, and that this was a major influence in garnering sympathy. They developed a range of points about why the audience feel sympathy for Ernestine and how Nottage achieved this effect. Candidates engaged well with the ideas: Ernestine's grief over her mother; the significance of her upcoming graduation; the symbolism of the dress; the financial struggles leading to the theft of the lace and Ermina's leg shaking reflecting the anxiety and guilt; Godfrey's decision to treat his new wife rather than buy the lace for his daughter and the critical comments from the inebriated Lily with Ernestine's '*[Wounded]*' response. Many candidates commented on the importance of Lily as a role model to Ernestine and Ernestine's maturity which is reflected in the way she challenges her aunt near the end of the extract.

Stronger answers showed understanding of the social context in which Ernestine's graduation as a young black woman is of particular significance. Contextually, stronger answers effectively integrated analysis of stage directions and symbols, analysing how Nottage employs these elements to deepen audience empathy for Ernestine's struggles and aspirations. They made links to the historical experiences of the black community at the time and saw Ernestine and Godfrey as representative of a past and more modern approach to social circumstances by the black community, but without lapsing into socio-historical commentary, losing focus on the terms of the question.

Less secure responses tended to focus on the interaction between Ernestine and Lily, ignoring the earlier part of the extract and offered little more than a paraphrase, or summary, with comment. Where used, the impact of quotations chosen was not explored, resulting in a re-telling of the scene or a character study of Lily and her shortcomings and strengths, missing the requirements of the question.

The weakest answers failed to focus on question and extract and instead provided a narrative based approach to events in which Ernestine was involved in the play or wrote a general description of her character. Some only focused on part of the extract, for example Sandra's death and the impact which this had or the fact that Ernestine had to make the dress herself and how this was hard work for her with her studies. Some candidates focused only on the background to the play and the poverty and racial aspects of society at the time. This evoked sympathy in that Ernestine was black and therefore subject to racial discrimination.

(b) The wording of the question, 'To what extent', invited candidates to explore Godfrey's character and the most successful answers acknowledged that Godfrey was a complex character who had weaknesses and strengths, providing specific and well-selected textual support for their views. The best answers were those which empathetically tried to understand Godfrey's position: the recent loss of his wife, Sandra; the fear of racism that made him not want to stand out or stand up to racists, and the context of USA in the '50s for a black family.

The strongest answers showed awareness of his strength as he moved his family for a fresh start. They saw him as a loving father in a difficult situation and explored the challenges that he faced after his wife's death with his decisions to stop drinking, to fight off Lily's advances and to establish a principled upbringing for his daughters through religion, even if he did not always do the best job. Many answers explored the opening of the play and his crippling grief, engaging effectively with Ernestine's use of the 'wailing like a banshee' image. Other strengths explored were his determination to provide for his children and his rejection of social expectations in marrying Gerte, as well as his relationship with his job.

Many candidates focused mainly on his weaknesses. One area of weakness which was explored effectively was Godfrey's obsession with Father Divine, blindly following an exploitative organisation which ultimately lets him down and renders him incapable of making a decision. Stronger responses explored the motif of the notebook, bags of paper and how Gerte leads him to eventually acknowledge his own foolishness with the destruction of the notes.

Weaker answers merely stated that Godfrey was weak by citing his neglect of his daughters due to his grief and his insensitivity to the loss of their mother, demonstrated by his hasty marriage to Gerte, prioritising her needs over theirs, for example, buying her the cardigan whilst not being able to afford the lace for Ernestine's graduation dress. There was little evidence of how the 'weakness' was displayed and understanding was often at surface level in a narrative approach. Although focusing on Godfrey, weaker answers provided a summary of the play rather than exploring what events and his behaviour conveyed of his character to the audience.

WOLE SOYINKA: *Death and the King's Horseman*

Question 2

(a) Some candidates struggled with the extract, confusing who was speaking to whom. Answers which argued that this was a conversation between the girls and Amusa were at a disadvantage, as this failed to understand the comedy of the girls mocking Amusa, parodying the colonial rulers and demonstrating the girls' knowledge of their habits, speech and opinions.

The most successful responses understood the context of the extract and the serious aspect that Amusa had been sent to arrest Elesin to prevent his ritual suicide which the girls were determined to prevent. They were able to recognise the mockery and the satire in the girls' parody of the British but often this was presented as paraphrase and explanation. Some stronger responses were able to recognise the irony of the fact that the girls' language was taken from the British stereotypes, proof in itself of the serious misconception that the British have of the 'natives' and of their oppression through colonial rule. Only the strongest answers recognised that the girls imitate the British and play-act that Amusa has no invitation to the British Residency and explored how well the girls understood what the British thought of them, their habit of seeing Africans mainly in relation to insulting stereotypes.

Many candidates commented on the fact that it was also evidence of the power of women in the Yoruban culture, from Iyaloja to the girls themselves, who are clearly well educated if they can so successfully mock Amusa. Few recognised that it was the older women who were 'tittering', and little was made of the visual impact on stage of the girls taking the policemen's hats or, at the end of the passage, their 'surging forward' to remove what they amusingly referred to as his 'knickers'.

A few made sensitive comments expressing sympathy for Amusa stating that he was a 'misfit' in society as the white people did not respect him, and the natives mocked him, and so this was a serious element to the extract as it reflected his unenviable predicament.

Less successful answers focused on colonial rule and British attitudes to the Nigerian population, gaining some credit for comments on the description of Amusa as an 'ox' and how the girls surprise him into jumping to attention. Weaker responses did not understand the girls were mocking the English and took the conversation literally.

(b) Most who answered this question appreciated that Olunde represents a bridge between the Yoruban and the British way of life. Some struggled with the idea of his 'dramatic impact', failing to focus on key theatrical moments, for example when Olunde finds out his father is alive, or when he rejects his father, or when his swaddled corpse appears on stage. They were able to demonstrate knowledge of the text and of Olunde's background: Elesin's son, sent to England by the Pilkings to study medicine. Only the strongest responses were able to explore Olunde's role in replacing Elesin, committing suicide to preserve order in the land – the father representing pleasure and the son duty, a reversal of the usual father-son dynamic. These answers analysed the communication, and misunderstanding, in the conversation between Olunde and Jane Pilkings, commenting on his calm, intelligence and self-assurance, by being aware of his history and by understanding why Jane Pilkings is disappointed in him. They were able to comment on the dramatic impact of his first entrance on stage that leads the audience to expect that he has been fully assimilated into the western culture making it particularly dramatic when the audience realises that he has committed ritual suicide in place of his father, Elesin.

Weaker responses consisted of a character profile, or a retelling of the plot, with limited focus or understanding of the requirements of the question. Some candidates were unable to refer to specific textual detail and answers were very general and explanatory in approach. There was some misreading of the text with candidates mistakenly thinking he had returned to see his father before he dies, rather than to bury him. There were some who seemed unaware that he has killed himself and the body brought on to stage is in fact Olunde's.

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: *A Streetcar Named Desire*

Question 3

(a) This was a popular choice of text and question. Candidates engaged with the extract and with the play as a whole. Surprisingly, where context was commented on, the only points mentioned tended to be the fact that Blanche and Stella had been out and the men had been playing poker. Only the most successful answers commented on the fact that Mitch has already been introduced to Blanche and that she has quizzed Stella about his background because he seems 'superior' to the other men, particularly Stanley. These candidates commented on her seductive behaviour, the '[dark red satin wrap]' and her attempts to project a romanticised image of herself. Better responses saw Blanche as both predator and victim here, recognising her cunning and deceit but also her desperation.

Not all candidates expressed any sympathy for her but the ones who did generally offered a more insightful and nuanced response, recognising that her words of comfort to Mitch are both genuine and also part of her strategy to build a relationship. There was awareness that Mitch is a strongly contrasting character to Stanley and that Blanche begins to see him as her last hope. There was focus on the discussion around the inscribed lighter, Blanche's '[feigned]' difficulty in reading as a way to get closer to Mitch, and on the drama of her words: 'Sick people have such deep, sincere attachments.' The symbol of the naked light bulb was much discussed. Most candidates were able to offer some insights and knowledge of character through the symbol of the lantern; Blanche's lies about her age and her drinking of alcohol, and these were contrasted with Mitch's sincerity and care in helping her put up the lantern.

In less successful answers there was some exposition on the Old South/New America, represented by Blanche and Mitch, but this was not always relevant. There was some misunderstanding of the text where candidates did not understand the stage direction '[feigned]' and commented on this revealing Blanche's poor eyesight and, consequently, her age. There were some unusual interpretations of the '[red satin wrapper]' with some stating that because it was red it foreshadowed Mitch attempting to rape her, whilst others linked the colour red to the devil.

Weaker candidates discussed this meeting without close reference to the question, offering a paraphrasing of, or a commentary on the conversation without much focus on what makes it 'memorable'. Too often they lapsed into narrative, retelling Blanche's history and the suicide of her young husband.

(b) This was a popular question and there was a wide range of answers seen. The most successful were aware of the tension between Stanley and Blanche and identified that part of the tension between them was the power struggle for Stella's approval and love. There was understanding of the conflict between the Old South and the New America, represented by Blanche and Stanley and the contrast in their backgrounds, lifestyles, values. Many were aware too of the physical contrast between the slight, fragile Blanche and the strong, muscular Stanley. They engaged with the relationship and were able to offer deeper interpretations of why their relationship is so dramatic. They focused on key scenes: Blanche's arrival and how her physical appearance contrasts with Stanley; Stanley overhearing Blanche telling Stella what she thinks about him; the rape scene and Blanche's departure with Stanley's final victory in the power struggle. The role of Stanley in uncovering the truth about Blanche and how this ultimately ended the relationship with Mitch was explored with critical understanding of the dramatic impact and staging. The best answers referenced his rape and deliberate forcing of Blanche into the world of reality whilst exploring the language, visual and aural effects of the shadows and the jungle noises, to show how the drama of the moment was made powerful. They were able to support their argument with reference to specific textual detail and relevant quotations.

Less successful responses tended to be more general in their comments, narrating parts of the play, and did not focus on how the relationship was made so 'powerfully dramatic'. Some wrote two character studies exploring their differences rather than focusing on key moments in their interaction and how they were dramatic. A few candidates misread the question and wrote about Stanley and Stella, rather than Stanley and Blanche with little of relevance to reward.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *A Midsummer's Night Dream*

Question 4

(a) This was a popular choice of text and question. The most successful answers established context briefly: Puck's error with the love potion results in both men loving Helena, Hermia is angry because she thinks Helena has stolen Lysander's love whilst Helena feels victimised because she thinks the other three are playing a trick on her. Candidates who did not have this clear understanding of the context were at a disadvantage. Those who did explored the insults in some detail, with the best not just explaining what they mean, but relating interpretations to this context, for example, 'juggler' with hints of juggling lovers, 'cankerblossom', that you may have a beauty which attracted the men, but you are diseased inside and 'thief' because Helena stole Lysander. Some commented on the humour of the ridiculous insult, their hilarious sounds, and the situation of two highly-born women, previously fairly genteel, throwing stupid and childish insults and threatening violence; some focused on their differences, for example, Helena tries to back down, whilst Hermia tries to fight back.

Better responses explored the humour of the dramatic turnaround of the women's friendship into enemies and Lysander's intense love for Hermia into his distaste for her. There was also the humour of Helena's previous grief at Demetrius not loving her and now that both men are declaring undying love for her, she does not believe them. The best candidates were able to comment on the visual staging of the height differences with close detail to the language, 'low', 'little', 'dwarf' and the final demeaning insults from Lysander on size, as well as 'maypole', and how this creates humour. There were some sensitive responses to the emotional and upsetting aspects of the scene for the women and how, nevertheless, it was entertaining due to the dramatic irony: the audience knowing it is temporary and will be put right. There were some good personal responses to Shakespeare's theme, for example, love being presented as fickle, ruining the sisterhood and loyalty of friends and love being blind.

Less successful answers were unclear about the situation with some confusion of characters and who loves whom. Some showed no knowledge of Puck's error and seemed genuinely confused about the use of language, providing a literal 'translation' and asserting certain words were entertaining but conveying little understanding of the language, situation, or how it was made so. They tended to be plot driven including some lengthy preambles about what had led to this point in

the play. Responses were narrative in approach simply re-telling the events of the extract rather than exploring how it was entertaining.

(b) The most successful answers considered what Oberon did in the play, and why, to decided how far they thought he was likeable. Most paid close attention to the question and produced balanced answers. They contrasted his affairs, his desire for the changeling boy and his dealings with Titania, against his compassion for Helena, his insistence on rectifying Puck's errors, his pity for Titania, and how he wishes the humans well by blessing the marriages at the end. There were some strong personal responses addressing Oberon's 'controlling' and 'abusive' behaviour towards Titania and his desire for power, including his use of 'illegal' or 'unfair' drugs to get his way. Better answers noted that he only pities Titania after he gets what he wants and looked at his relationship with Puck, accusing him of encouraging Puck's reckless behaviour at the start, but when Oberon finds his error with the potion he is exasperated and insists it is rectified. A few candidates noted that he does not leave Titania to Puck but he applies the potion to Titania and removes it himself. Most finally arrived at the conclusion that his acts were worthy of admiration due to his sympathy for Helena and removal of the '*hateful*' vision from Titania to restore order and ensure all the lovers have a partner. The best candidates were able to explore the dramatic impact of Oberon and Puck's use of the love potion, supporting their argument with specific textual detail and some well-selected quotations which were thoroughly analysed.

Less successful answers tended to find him totally 'likeable' to the point of defending his cruel treatment of Titania to 'torment' her for the supposed 'injury' but these were not always convincingly argued. Others responded to the climate changes he and Titania cause by quarrelling, but found it difficult to relate this to whether he is 'likeable' or not.

Weaker answers wrote a character study of Oberon with little reference to the question of his likeability. There was also some misunderstanding with some thinking he had given Bottom the ass's head for her to fall in love with. Some candidates, attempting to explore language, made confusing references to Bottom/ass/arse demonstrating a fundamental misunderstanding of the text and language.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Othello*

Question 5

(a) This was the most popular text and most candidates answered this question. Candidates demonstrated excellent knowledge of the text but should be reminded to focus on the question and extract: some candidates used information from previous questions, for example, on Iago and attempted to adapt it to this question, often unsuccessfully.

The most successful answers provided detailed comments on what made this moment both dramatic and significant. They were able to contextualise the extract, briefly, and to incorporate other salient moments from the play to demonstrate the 'significance', without losing focus on the question and extract. There was understanding that Iago had orchestrated the drunken brawl which has led to Cassio's demotion and most answers explored Cassio's distress, selecting examples of repetition, exclamation and hyperbole in his language. Many responses honed in on the opening line and the repetition of '*my reputation*'. Better responses explored the meaning and effect of '*reputation*' on Cassio in the context of the times and made the link between honour and reputation.

Most answers explored the dramatic irony, along with the use of sibilance and other language features, connecting them to the question requirements securely. There was understanding of Iago's claims of love, honesty and advice in this scene and that Iago's advice is, in fact, a key step in his insidious plan to destroy Cassio, Othello and Desdemona. Stronger answers engaged with the religious imagery especially to the 'devil' and explored the irony that Iago is the real devil. They explored the animal imagery – dog, lion and parrot with strong responses linking Cassio's comment on wine making him '*speak parrot*' and men '*putting an enemy in their mouths*' to Iago's manipulation of him later with Desdemona.

Other valuable points included comparison of Cassio's distress and Iago's composed and manipulative manner, exploration of how Iago succeeds in calming Cassio down through the passage and has completely persuaded him by the end, discussion of the breakdown of Cassio's language, its fragmentation and use of bestial imagery, and the recognition of Shakespeare's use of prose in this passage and its effect. Many answers included relevant reference to Iago's plan to

make Othello jealous; however, some answers focused too much on the scheme against Othello, paying insufficient attention to the passage itself.

Less successful answers simply narrated the scene with the weakest responses focussing on a character study of Iago, therefore not meeting the question requirements fully. A number of responses mentioned '*beasts*' and '*devil*' and hellish motifs being repeated but failed to explore the significance of this. Some candidates focused entirely on punctuation, for example, the use of short sentences: '*I know not*' and '*Drunk!*' but were unable to develop or link their choices to the question. Line references, rather than direct quotations, resulted in responses being underdeveloped and the loss of opportunities to explore the ways the writer achieved effects which is a requirement to meet the criteria for marks in the higher levels.

(b) Many candidates argued assertively that Brabantio is not sympathetic due to his racist and misogynistic outlook. The strongest answers were able to consider both his sympathetic and less sympathetic aspects. These answers showed understanding of the Jacobean context with its patriarchal, gender and hierarchical norms. However, there were some sweeping generalisations about the prejudices of Jacobean audiences with many candidates overlooking the fact that Othello was accepted by Brabantio before the marriage with no reference to his ethnicity. Stronger answers looked at how Brabantio is provoked by Iago and Roderigo's language, betrayed by his daughter and dismissed later by the Duke. They engaged effectively with the inherent racism and sexism in Brabantio's accusations in Act 1. The language Brabantio used when referring to Othello was explored with better answers exploring the way he was confronted in the middle of the night, caught unawares and publicly shamed by Iago and Roderigo. The sexual imagery, linked to animals was explored as something difficult for any father, no matter what the race of the man.

Some answers explored valuably his final, ironic, warning to Othello and Desdemona's betrayal. There was understanding of Brabantio's loss of face and its importance to him with some noting that he was one of Iago's early victims. Candidates explored his sense of betrayal, contrasting a loving father missing his daughter with his encouraging Othello to doubt her trustworthiness and the implications of this. Some responses examined the idea of Brabantio's 'ownership' of his daughter, with a more modern perspective, and whether he deserved sympathy.

Weaker candidates often focused on the idea that Brabantio is a 'loving' father but offered little evidence to support this. Some candidates took a very personal response here, imaging how they would feel if their loving child betrayed them. While this showed engagement with the question, it often led to limited engagement with the actual text. There was a common misunderstanding of what happens to Brabantio at the end, whether he was dead or alive when Desdemona died but most candidates saw that in a way Brabantio was right to be concerned about the marriage considering his daughter was murdered.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 2010/23

Drama

There were too few candidates for a meaningful report to be produced.