

# LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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Paper 2010/12  
Poetry and Prose

## Key messages

In successful responses, candidates:

- sustain a focus on the question from the very start of their answer
- write focused personal responses that are informed by their close study of the text
- select relevant material to support their answer
- support their ideas with well-selected concise quotations
- analyse sensitively and in detail ways in which writers achieve their effects.

In less successful responses, candidates:

- begin their answers with unnecessary background information or list of themes or list of devices the writer uses
- refer in general terms to 'themes' they have revised without addressing the key words of the question
- show only a simple grasp of surface meanings
- depend on explanation and assertion rather than close analysis
- use long quotations without exploring the effects created by specific words, phrases and sounds
- use ellipses in quotations which omit those key words that would support their ideas
- log writing devices without exploring the effects created
- make general personal responses about ideas not actually in the text, including references to their own lives.

## General comments

There was much evidence of assured work and enjoyment of the texts studied this session especially in relation to **Section A**, where the most successful candidates showed insight and individuality in their responses to poetry questions.

The strongest responses showed evidence of an ability to select and tailor relevant material for the question that had been set. As explained in previous reports, this is an essential requirement of the examination: questions are not prompts for candidates to unload all their knowledge about the poem or character or theme or setting mentioned in a question. In less effective responses, candidates explained themes they had learned without regard to the key words of the question.

Candidates should be reminded that there is little merit in trying to write exhaustively for 45 minutes, as this is likely to lead to a lack of focus. The excessive length of some answers was caused by candidates trying to cram in too much learnt material in ways that adversely affected the quality of their answers. In these responses, comments were laboured or repeated whereas many shorter responses were more focused because ideas were expressed concisely. Those candidates who wrote a brief plan before starting their answer tended to produce more effectively organised answers.

The most successful responses focused on the key words of the question in their opening paragraph, paying attention from the start to those intensifiers (adjectives and adverbs such as 'striking' and 'vividly') that help candidates to select relevant material to shape their answers. There were, however, too many introductions that included one or more of the following before addressing the question: biographical information; a list of themes considered relevant to the text; a list of random techniques the writer uses. Some introductions rehearsed at length the main ideas in subsequent paragraphs of the essay. There were also too many unproductive final paragraphs that simply repeated ideas made earlier in the answer and, thereby, wasted time.

The most convincing personal responses integrated concise quotations to support the points they made. For Poetry and extract-based Prose answers, candidates were able to quote directly from the text printed in the question paper. Success in Prose general essays depended on candidates' command of the detail of their set text. More confident candidates were able to deploy an impressively wide range of direct quotation to support their ideas whereas those unable to recall relevant textual reference relied on general assertions. Some candidates used ellipses to shorten quotations but in a way that omitted the key words that would support the point they were making. Candidates should be taught how to integrate concise quotations into their response.

The most successful responses sustained critical analysis of ways in which writers achieve their effects in conveying their ideas. Less successful responses simply logged devices without close exploration of *precise* ways in which writers use them to create *specific* effects. The most assertive and least effective comments were found in Poetry answers where enjambment, caesura and patterns of rhyme were often simply mentioned, though without illustration or precise critical comment. Learners should be encouraged to distinguish between assertion and close analysis.

Some candidates applied the terms 'poem', 'play' and 'novel' to the wrong literary form. This was often more than a slip of the pen and was evidence of a lack of appreciation of a writer's use of form. For these candidates, poetry essays became mere paraphrases of the poem attempting to pin down meanings rather than explore ways in which poets achieve their effects. Similarly, prose essays focused on content and neglected to comment on ways in which fiction writers use, for example, description, dialogue and narrative viewpoint to convey their ideas. Some candidates referred to the 'play' rather than 'novel' or 'short story'.

Most candidates wrote in legible handwriting though some did not. The audience for the script is the Examiner, not the candidate. Teachers should remind candidates of the fundamental importance of communicating their ideas clearly to Examiners.

## **Comments on specific questions**

### **Section A**

#### **Question 1**

Most answers showed understanding that Ozymandias had been a powerful though forgotten figure, mentioned only by the 'traveller from an antique land'. Candidates grasped that he was a tyrannical ruler whose boast 'Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!' is ironically undercut by the brevity of the sentence that follows: 'Nothing beside remains'. The strongest responses sustained a focus on ways in which Shelley vividly contrasts the past and present. These responses explored the enduring impact of the sculptor who captured so skilfully Ozymandias's 'sneer of cold command' that could still be discerned in the statue's 'shattered visage'. Less successful responses worked through the poem, exploring language features such as alliteration, though without linking their comments to either the ideas in the poem or the key words of the question. Some responses were more intent on citing parallels with King George III or Rameses II at the expense of answering the question.

#### **Question 2**

Most candidates grasped the central idea that the speaker 'never expected much of life' from his childhood wistfully conveyed in 'Since as a child I used to lie/Upon the leaze and watch the sky'. The most successful responses showed understanding that the speaker never expected 'That life would all be fair', focusing on the significance of the word 'all'. By contrast, those who missed this asserted that the speaker thinks life would not be fair in any way. Stronger responses recognised the reflective and resigned tone of the speaker, conveying his mature realisation that life offers neither extremes of joy nor despair, just 'neutral-tinted haps'. They showed a clear understanding of which lines were spoken by the speaker and addressed to the World and of which lines were spoken by the World to the speaker. Those candidates who were less clear about this distinction assumed that the speaker (rather than the World) had been 'loved desperately' or 'with smooth serenity'. Weaker responses attempted to communicate personal interpretations of the poem which were not rooted in or supported by the detail of the poem and which struggled to address the question.

### Question 3

Most answers showed at least some understanding that the everyday action of boarding a bus is made to seem violent and dangerous, with the other passengers representing a threat. Many responses explored the imagery of battle and the use of violent diction (such as 'strangulation' and 'hauled'), and there was much reference to the poem as a set of instructions about how to board a bus. The more successful responses explored the humour created by hyperbole (such as 'tighten your belt/to avoid being undressed'). Stronger answers also analysed the implications of the instruction to 'pay no attention to human sounds' and the idea that 'words lose meaning/until you are inside the bus'. Stronger responses supported their interpretations with relevant textual detail; weaker responses offered overly assertive readings of the poem without exploring ways in which Chingono creates meanings and achieves effects.

### Question 4

In most answers there was an awareness that the poem is written in honour of a campaigner against apartheid. There was, in general, an understanding that people like Suzman can bring about change and that, with even a small amount of pressure, significant change can happen. The most successful responses considered the poem's deeper implications, taking their cue from the intensifier 'vividly' in the question. Among the effects explored were those created by the image of 'A lot of small hands in a monstrous hall', the central metaphor of 'very same tune that has been sung/time and again' and the use of repeated onomatopoeia in 'buzz'. More successful responses that commented on the use of rhyme offered specific examples such as the idea of repression conveyed by the rhyming of 'crushed' with 'hushed'. Less successful responses listed devices without analytical comment or focus on the key words of the question.

### Question 5

Stronger responses showed an understanding of the setting as being integral to the relationship between the men and nature, with a convincing analysis of, for example, the 'plunging valleys' and 'bareback of hill'. There was understanding of the physicality of both the game and the natural world, seemingly in competition with one another. In these responses, candidates interpreted the poem as a celebration of vitality and resilience amidst harsh but invigorating conditions: 'rubbery men bounced after it', 'wingers leapt'. They likened the men's joy to children and their carefree innocence, supported by the imagery of 'bunting colours' and 'their blown ball bounced'. Less successful responses provided superficial commentary, listing imagery without explanation, paraphrasing or lacking specific examples. Some answers regarded nature as purely hostile, neglecting its beauty and power and the significance of the final two lines. Others wrote about the poet's background at some length and/or provided unnecessary comparisons with Hughes' other poems.

### Question 6

Stronger responses provided detailed analysis of Hughes' sensual imagery and descriptions of light, sound and silence, colours and heat. These responses offered an insightful exploration of mood: the calm, almost playful mood of the first two stanzas followed by a shift to reverence and then the darker mood of fear. They analysed the imagery that conveys a sense of awe and respect which gradually affects everything. They commented on the effect of the paradoxical 'sinks upward' and 'booming softly' as indicators of a magical and unpredictable being. Less successful responses attempted a literal interpretation only, struggling with meaning and understanding even of surface meanings. These responses tended to paraphrase without exploring poetic techniques or the poem's changing mood and tone. In these answers, poetic features such as enjambment and caesura were mentioned though not explored. The weakest responses misunderstood or ignored the significance of the harvest and seasonal change, particularly concerning the fields of wheat. Less successful responses tended to list or describe devices.

## Section B

### Question 7

Most candidates were able to pick out details from the extract to show why the moment is dramatic: Chielo breaking abruptly into the peaceful setting; her taking away the sick child; the latter's crying; Chielo's shouts and incantations. Although many candidates grasped the unusual behaviour of Okonkwo 'pleading', only the more successful responses were able to explore sensitively this rare moment of his vulnerability. In analysing ways in which Achebe makes this moment dramatic, the strongest responses sustained a close engagement with his use of symbolism in 'The two voices disappeared into the thick darkness' and the imagery of Ekwefi as the 'hen whose only chick has been carried away by a kite'. Less successful responses tended to concentrate solely on meaning. For example, they stated that the priestess is angry when she says 'Does a

man speak when a god speaks? Beware!'. Some mentioned the use of a rhetorical question, though only the strongest responses considered the tone in which the words are uttered, her pointed contrast between 'man' and 'god' and her not expecting her authority to be challenged.

### Question 8

Most answers recognised the contrast between father and son. Unoka was a 'lazy and improvident man', who borrowed money, played music and drank wine whereas Okonkwo is a prize wrestler, earns titles, makes a success of his yams, has a homestead and three wives. Less successful responses tended to write character sketches that treated the characters as real-life people rather than fictional constructs. The most successful responses focused on the presentation of the relationship as one defined by resentment, shame and a deep emotional conflict rooted in Igbo values of masculinity and legacy. In the strongest responses, candidates were able to draw upon a range of direct quotation they had learned. For example, the following quotation with its key word 'ruled' suggested not just Okonkwo's dislike but an obsessive drive: 'Okonkwo was ruled by one passion – to hate everything that his father loved'. Some candidates drew apt comparison between Okonkwo's resentment of Unoka and Nwoye's resentment in turn of Okonkwo, though in less successful responses candidates strayed too far from the question by focusing excessively on the relationship between Okonkwo and Nwoye.

### Question 9

There was at least some understanding of the context: that Nanda Kaul does not like receiving phone calls at any time, and especially not from Ila Das, who is determined to visit, particularly to meet Raka. Only the strongest answers focused on the question's key word 'disturbing', referring to the unpleasantness of Nanda Kaul's attitude towards a supposed long-standing friend, her scathing mockery of her voice (described as 'her tragedy in life'). These answers explored closely the effects of the detailed descriptions of Ila Das's voice as viewed from Kaul's perspective: 'piping, shrilling screech', 'screamed', 'like a long nail scratching at a glass pane' and 'a small child gone berserk'. They considered Nanda Kaul's obsessive hankering after a life of solitude and the symbolism in her identification with the worm snapped in two by the hen ('she winced at its mutilation'). Less successful responses worked their way through the extract paraphrasing content or explaining quotations they used.

### Question 10

There were too few responses to make meaningful comment.

### Question 11

Most candidates showed an awareness of the context: Magwitch's dying moments in prison having been fatally wounded after trying to escape; his receiving comfort from Pip's visits every day. They understood too the mutual affection between the two evident in the terms of endearment ('Dear boy' and 'Dear Magwitch'). The most successful responses showed insight into the changed relationship between the two characters that make this moment 'so moving', contrasting Pip's earlier embarrassment of Magwitch to his genuine affection in this extract. In such responses, candidates explored Dickens's use of pathos in the sincerity of Pip's words and in the dignity and gentle hand gestures of Magwitch. There was also a sensitive appreciation of the death-bed scene taking place in a prison, though less successful responses strayed from the question when they wrote excessively and assertively about the injustice of the legal system in Victorian England. Less successful responses tended to work through the extract explaining content without addressing the question's key words.

### Question 12

There were too few responses to make meaningful comment.

### Question 13

Stronger responses achieved a clear focus on the extract and question; analysis was directed to the specific moment, correctly placed in context, with only appropriate and helpful reference to the wider novel. These responses addressed the narrative perspective as essential to a close understanding of the extract, revealing her insecurities and emotions; candidates contrasted her immaturity (as in her childish request to go home) and sense of inadequacy with Maxim's dominance. They explored how du Maurier creates a specific emotional and psychological mood which contributes to the revealing of the characters of Maxim and the narrator. They considered how the scene foreshadows the problems ahead at Manderley. Less successful

responses lacked knowledge of the extract's context, with some candidates thinking Maxim had just proposed or that they were already married. Some responses simply summarised the extract, showing some understanding of it though without linking their points to the specific requirements of the question.

#### Question 14

More successful responses clearly grasped the development of the narrative as secrets are revealed about the relationship between Maxim and Rebecca; they analysed du Maurier's use of dramatic irony and retrospective narration. They explored the imbalance of power and Rebecca's confident manipulation of everyone, discussing Maxim's loathing of her, his inability to control her and his eventual confession, showing detailed knowledge of the text, supported by specific and well-chosen quotations from key moments. The strongest answers highlighted how Rebecca's public image as the perfect wife contrasted with her true behaviour and made their relationship unbearable for Maxim and commented on how her 'ghost' continues to have power over Maxim and Manderley. Less successful responses lacked an ability to tailor material to the actual question, with some focusing almost entirely on Rebecca herself rather than their relationship, or on Rebecca's influence on the narrator rather than on Maxim. Some suggested that, as part of a patriarchal society, Maxim was entirely to blame for the problems in their relationship, as he did not respect Rebecca's freedom.

#### Question 15

Stronger answers explored specific techniques used in Lee's portrayal of Atticus (such as dialogue, narrative voice, comparison to others). They explored how his moral courage, kindness, care and respect for his children and his restraint are revealed by reference to the detail of the extract and recognised Scout's perspective at the time and later as shaping readers' impressions. They linked Atticus's views on parenting to his reasons for taking the case and were able to focus on 'striking impressions' rather than just an overview of his character. Less successful responses were character sketches that described Atticus as 'kind', 'a good man' or 'smart' without textual support and described his involvement in the trial at length, and the injustice Tom is facing, without sufficient reference to either the extract or question. Less successful responses wrote excessively about themes, such as justice, without clearly applying them to the question and/or were sidetracked by generalisations about how people 'of that era' generally brought up their children or how they 'all' had racist views.

#### Question 16

Stronger responses commented on Lee's presentation of Mrs Dubose as a symbol of Maycomb's prejudice but also a brave and determined lady. In these responses, candidates understood her role in the presentation and development of characters in the Finch family and supported their observations about her racism, extreme rudeness to the Finch family and her determination, with precise details and quotations they had learned. In the most successful answers, candidates focused on the key words 'How far?' and 'sympathy', recognising the mixed emotions she engenders. They recognised that she was suffering from isolation and devastating pain and explored Atticus's idea that she had 'real courage'. Less successful answers offered only a few straightforward points at surface level, that she is 'brave' or 'mean', often unsupported by quotations. These answers were repetitive and/or made speculative assertions about her character. Some confused her with other characters, usually Miss Maudie.

#### Question 17

The more successful responses understood Sarah's unenviable position at the school and how vital it is that Mrs Valange succeeds in helping her – in this pivotal moment in the novel. They focused on the significance of the letter being left at the back of the drawer as a symbol of the neglect Sarah has suffered from. In the strongest answers, there was close exploration of how Lindsay presents the clash between the two women, the contrast between them and how sad and significant it is that Mrs Valange does not triumph. There were thoughtful comments about the language used in the extract, for example, the tone of the letter. Less successful responses showed an insecure understanding of the context, Sarah's position at the school and why the forgotten letter is so significant to the plot of the novel. These answers adopted a narrative approach, simply re-telling the content of the extract and what happened to Sarah afterwards without regard to the question or the detail and language of the extract.

#### Question 18

Stronger responses included the varied experiences of all those who visited the Rock: the girls and teachers at the Picnic, Mike and Albert, and Mrs Appleyard. They made insightful links between the Rock and

aboriginal history; how the Rock is seen as alive and with secrets of its own; candidates supported their responses with reference to descriptions of the creatures living there, the vegetation, the caves and rock formations as well as the idea of time stopping. They explored the eerie atmosphere which makes the girls sleep and then compels them to keep moving and discussed the fate of the three who are never found. Less successful responses revealed an insufficient range of relevant textual detail, for example, Mike's attempt to find Miranda and Mrs Appleyard's gruesome death there. Some weaker responses were almost entirely narrative or focused entirely on the girls' disappearance on the day of the Picnic. Some responses wrote at length prepared notes about the 'theme' of colonialism without linking their comments to the specific focus of the question.

### Question 19

Stronger responses analysed the way Wells presents the curate's physical appearance, his religious language and beliefs about the arrival of the apocalypse using relevant details and quotations from the extract. They contrasted his attitude of pessimism and doom, that the Martians were sent by God and therefore undefeatable, with the narrator's attempts to find a solution with calm rationality. In these responses, candidates understood the narrator's role in the presentation of the curate's unravelling, focusing on the curate's unstable and emotional outbursts, with his questions, repetition, dashes and exclamations, as evidence of his weakness, fragility and increasing disorientation. Less successful responses fixated on the curate as 'mad'/'deranged'/'insane' without much development beyond this. Some candidates wrote excessively about the invasion as symbolic of colonialism, without focusing on either the question or the detail of the extract. Some asserted that various things the curate said or did were 'striking' though without support or analysis.

### Question 20

In the few responses seen, there was comment on how the narrator has been learning throughout as the disaster unfolds and a sense of the limits of human change and a misplaced human arrogance. In general, however, responses offered overly assertive comments about the selfishness of humans and their ineptitude in dealing with the invasion, with little evidence of exploring ways in which Wells achieves his effects. Some responses wrote at length about colonialism without addressing the question or providing supporting detail from the text.

### Question 21

Stronger responses explored language, dialogue and narrative viewpoint to support ideas about Sharma's 'saintliness' for example, rather than just making points about Sharma's ill-treatment. These responses focused on the question and developed ideas of inequality between the white sahibs and the Indian workers which accounts for the cold, uncaring way he is treated. The most successful responses analysed closely the mounting tension and the extreme anxiety Sharma had to experience while waiting for his meeting with Mr Acton. In these answers, candidates contrasted Mr Acton's 'ambivalent smile' and appearance with the reality of his feelings for his workers, which did not bode well for Sharma; they considered Sharma's modest dreams of retirement and how these were to be shattered with such carelessness by Mr Acton. Less successful responses narrated the rest of the story or mentioned a few points about sympathy but did not develop or support them. Some candidates became distracted by a lengthy consideration of the evils of colonialism and the treatment of the Indian workers without relating their comments to specific details in the extract.

### Question 22

Stronger responses argued that Annie was seemingly rejecting her family and home to help her face life alone on the journey and in a new country. These candidates observed that the relationship is nuanced: she wants her independence but will miss her parents. They understood that she has had a caring home with parents who have loved her, showed knowledge of the many examples of her parents' care for her as well as her apparent abhorrence of some of their habits, supporting these with detailed reference and direct quotation. They identified their emotional farewells, particularly with her mother, as she finally left, as evidence of their love for each other. Less successful responses focused only on the negative side of the relationship and lacked textual detail to support their generalised ideas and/or ignored the question's key word 'vivid'.

This set text comprises ten stories from *Stories of Ourselves: Volume 2*. Candidates need to have a detailed knowledge of the stories (including direct references to support their ideas) if they are to achieve the higher levels of the mark scheme.

# LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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**Paper 2010/13**  
**Poetry and Prose**

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

# LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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Paper 2010/22

Drama

## Key messages

- Beginning a response with lengthy comments on the writer's life 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.
- The most successful responses addressed the key terms of the question in the introductory paragraph. Attention was paid to the intensifier, to help them to select the most appropriate material to answer the question.
- Textual reference and quotations should support ideas, be relevant, concise, and analysed fully, demonstrating how the reference supports the point. Commenting on quotations chosen at random, without exploring the context and linking it to the question, is unlikely to achieve reward.
- Candidates should be aware that punctuation cannot be seen by an audience, consequently commenting on punctuation per se, is unlikely to achieve reward unless explored in context with the content and effect included.
- In passage-based questions, successful answers briefly contextualised the passage, selected the most relevant material from across the whole passage, including the ending, and analysed both content and the writer's methods effectively. Excessive reference to the whole text is not a requirement of the question.
- Successful discursive responses remained focused on the question and selected a range of precise textual references from across the whole text to support ideas.
- 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, enjoyment and engagement with their set texts, demonstrating understanding of 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. There were responses seen to all texts although the new set texts, Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* and Shelagh Delaney's, *A Taste of Honey*, were less popular. The most popular text, across all components, was *A Street Car Named Desire* followed by *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. There were fewer responses seen to *Death and the King's Horseman*; centres are reminded that this text will be replaced on the set syllabus texts in 2026, by Pearl Cleage's *Blues for an Alabama Sky*.

With 45 minutes per essay, candidates should begin to answer the question immediately. However, some candidates wrote lengthy introductions of extraneous information, plot summaries, and lists of themes and literary devices to be covered, before referring to the question. This often resulted in responses with tenuous links to the actual question so lacked the relevant textual detail to meet the criteria for the higher levels. There is no requirement for candidates 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, 'dramatic' 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 focusing on the terms of the question, is unlikely to achieve high reward. Candidates are reminded not to refer to line numbers instead of quoting from the text, as this limits opportunities for analysis of the ways writers achieve effects.

An awareness that these texts are written to be performed onstage informed the most successful answers. The most successful candidates understood that characters were constructs, created by the writer, and not real people. They referred to the 'audience' rather than 'reader' and the 'play' rather than 'novel', 'text' or 'book'. They 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. The best responses 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, is unproductive. Exclamation marks cannot be seen by an audience and not all exclamation marks mean that the character shouts that line. Punctuation is relevant in so far as it organises speech but any comment on the use of punctuation has to be analysed in context and the effect explored otherwise the comment is meaningless.

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. These can be relevant but only if related to the ideas conveyed in the text. Candidates should avoid stating the obvious, for example, the writer uses 'diction', 'lexis' or 'vocabulary', and should focus on analysing specific language and the effects achieved. Whilst watching a live performance of their chosen texts is informative in conveying the dramatic impact of the written text, candidates are reminded that there is no requirement to write about different stage performances they have seen; responses should be firmly rooted in the text.

Most candidates were clear about the exam requirement and answered one passage-based question and one discursive. However, there was an increase in rubric infringements where candidates answered two passage-based questions or two answers on the same text. In this case, both essays were marked but only the higher mark awarded. Centres are reminded to refer to the Syllabus requirements at the start of the course. Candidates should remember to label their answers clearly, with the question number at the top of the response and be made aware that mislabelled questions will be amended by the Examiner and, where appropriate, the rubric penalty applied.

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**

#### **SHELAGH DELANEY: *A Taste of Honey***

##### **Question 1**

(a) This was the least popular text but unsurprisingly as this is its first year of examination. Few answers gave context to this moment and why Helen was there with many focusing entirely on Peter, overlooking the other characters' lines. Most answers considered the arguing to be dramatic and explored the drama of Helen and Peter's relationship. Peter's drunken antics provide a good deal of drama in this scene that is not difficult to explain or illustrate, and most candidates focused mostly on him, often to good effect but also to the detriment of exploration of the other characters. His singing, swearing, clumsiness, and rudeness to all the others on stage, provide a wealth of

relevant material, and many candidates achieved highly by quoting and commenting on key instances.

The most successful answers focused on 'dramatic' both in the written text – the arguing, insults, swearing – and in the action on stage – Peter's initial sudden and unexpected entrance and his drunken singing. His behaviour was considered humorous and disgusting in equal measure. Better answers explored Delaney's black humour and the stage directions with the 'loud crash' offstage and his drunkenness, singing and falling over and derogatory comments to all. Most answers expressed outrage at Peter's attitude to Helen, Jo and Geof, with his vulgar, abusive comments and could explore some of the language. His prejudices, homophobia and sexism and unkindness to Jo as an unmarried, expectant young girl, are openly displayed, and most candidates were alert to the writer's intentions here.

The best responses explored closely his discriminatory language, for example his insulting and salacious comments to and about Helen, while less successful answers wrote more generally about what his remarks say about gender politics in the 1950s without precise focus on the language he uses. They noted Jo's increased restraint suggesting her character development and the ironically dismissive treatment of Geof, given his importance to Jo and the calm he has brought to the flat. Some perceptive responses also commented on how Peter seems to be actively enjoying himself here, receiving sadistic pleasure from his performance, understanding the reference to the Oedipus story – how he too had married an older woman (Helen being old enough to be his mother) and understanding how unlike Oedipus he had 'only scratched out one' of (his eyes), a reference to him losing the sight of an eye.

Weaker answers focused on background information, the text as an example of a 'Kitchen-sink drama' with attempts to contextualise this moment in terms of the play's themes; the status of women in society and how attitudes to homosexuality have changed since the play was written. These responses often become quite general, losing focus on the question and the passage, making assertions without providing close textual reference in support. Attempts to explore the text focused on Peter being drunk and rude, quoting 'Jezebel' and 'bubble belly' but without understanding how they were insulting or indicative of deeper attitudes.

**(b)** There were very few responses to this question. Some wrote a character study, all they knew about Geof: his homosexuality; his caring, maternal nature and the happiness he brings into Jo's life but without addressing how this contributes to the dramatic impact. All candidates were aware that homosexuality was considered a crime in the 1950s and the most successful answers were sympathetic to the problems this created for him, exploring his desire for a happy family life with Jo, linking this to his dramatic impact. They were able to identify how they were both social misfits and how that affected their place in life and the limited opportunities they would be afforded because of their identity or circumstance. Better answers contrasted him with Helen and her treatment and abandonment of Jo and how he dramatically invites Helen back into Jo's life, with the unforeseen consequences for himself. They explored what he brings into Jo's life and how he benefits from their relationship with acceptance, partnership and family life.

Less successful answers found it difficult to recall sufficient textual detail other than Helen and Peter's rudeness to Geof whilst some simply used the passage for 1(a) to list things Peter says to him without other detail. Some gave a lengthy outraged personal response to their attitudes towards Geof and homosexuality in general without addressing the question or supporting ideas. Others focused on how they felt sorry for Geof, retelling his relationship with Jo, and with stereotypical comments on how gay men were intrinsically more caring than others.

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

#### **Question 2**

**(a)** There was good understanding of the text with insightful analysis of how Soyinka makes this pivotal scene so shocking. The most successful briefly contextualised the passage and how Amusa's unsuccessful attempt to arrest Elesin had resulted in Pilkings being called from the ball to deal with the disturbance, at the same time as Olunde arrives to bury his father. They showed understanding of the tensions and cultural conflict at the heart of this scene, particularly the shock surrounding Elesin's failure to fulfil his ritual duty, and the emotional aftermath between father and son. Many commented insightfully on Elesin's shame and fall from honour, recognising the dramatic contrast between his earlier role and his current humiliation, exemplified by Olunde's words: 'I have no

*father, eater of leftovers,’ but only the best answers demonstrated a clear understanding of his words.*

The best answers noted the understatement of Pilkings’ reference to the ‘affair’ and ‘crisis’, his motivation in keeping ‘His Highness’ happy and the role reversal with the final shocking image of Elesin, sobbing in the dirt with the ‘light’ fading. They explored the dramatic effect of offstage voices, which inform both the audience, Olunde and Jane of what has happened. They recognised the dramatic contrast of the commotion and stage directions of Elesin’s, ‘bellowing’ and ‘powerful steps’ against Olunde’s frozen stance and silence – perhaps conveying Olunde’s realisation of what this means for his father and his people, and of course his own fate and what he now must do, emphasised by how ‘walks slowly’ and with intent along ‘the way’ his father had run.

Less successful answers spent too much time retelling the plot, the presentation of Simon Pilkings or colonial issues and Jane’s comforting of Olunde, but did not reach the most shocking part. These tended to work through the passage either paraphrasing events, or adopting a linear approach, rather than focusing on the most relevant material making this moment so shocking. There was limited focus on discussing the language or stage directions. Assertions were made, for example, Elesin ‘shows shame’ but no exploration or development as to why.

**(b)** There were fewer answers to this question with only the most successful answers addressing Jane Pilkings’ dramatic impact in the play. Most answers identified her as a contrast to Pilkings, a more culturally sensitive and humane version of colonialism. She was seen as a supportive and dutiful wife but able to confront her husband, for example in the 1(a) passage where she screams: ‘*Simon, tell them to leave him (Elesin) alone*’ and where she admonishes Simon for his views, ‘*devious bastards*’ on the locals. She was also seen as generally more sympathetic towards Amusa and Joseph in the Egungun costume scene. Though she does not understand Olunde’s story and view of death as one for the greater good of others, she at least attempts to understand the cultural importance of Yoruba tradition in contrast to Pilkings’ view of it as all ‘*mumbo jumbo*’. Better answers commented on her complex role as both observer and reluctant participant in the colonial disruption of Yoruba customs. They tracked her development from typical colonial wife to a more nuanced and emotionally involved figure by the end of the play with her growing empathy and insight, such as her attempt to shelter Olunde and recognise the enormity of his loss (‘*poor orphan*’). A few insightful answers drew comparisons between Jane and Iyaloja and their dramatic impact suggesting similar issues of women in both cultures being controlled by powerful and flawed men.

Less successful responses struggled to find enough to say and go beyond a character study of Jane and her role as Pilkings’ wife. Some scenes were summarised with limited textual detail or engagement with the dramatic impact. She was seen as kind and sympathetic but without deeper exploration of her dramatic role.

## TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: *A Streetcar Named Desire*

### Question 3

**(a)** There were many critical and insightful responses which engaged with the text and question. The most successful briefly contextualised the passage, the break-up with Mitch and Stella is in hospital and, being alone with Blanche, this was the ideal moment for Stanley to challenge her ‘*lies and conceit and tricks*,’ with all the evidence needed to exact his revenge. There is much which is disturbing to explore and most candidates commented on the disturbing mental breakdown Blanche experiences adding to the cruelty of Stanley’s verbal and physical attack.

Most candidates understood the tensions and the dynamics between the characters and sympathised with Blanche in the face of the barrage from Stanley, commenting on Blanche’s lies unravelling and Stanley’s brutal disassembling of these. The contrast in the dialogue was noted with Blanche’s short responses and Stanley’s increasingly aggressive comments. The most successful answers commented in depth about the use of dialogue with well-selected references to support ideas. The domination of dialogue by Blanche at the start, Stanley’s short responses, then the dramatic change as the power dynamic changed was explored. Many candidates made relevant references to the themes and how the exchange addressed ‘*delusion and reality*’. Very few understood ‘*casting my pearls before swine*’, with literal explanations of the ‘pearls’ representing Blanche, and the ‘swine’, Stanley and Mitch, leading to some unusual comments about pigs.

The best answers made critical comments on the punctuation, especially as Blanche begins to stutter and her use of broken or unfinished sentences that indicate her panic and fear. They recognised Stanley's metaphorical tearing of the '*paper lantern*' and reference to her '*worn out*' outfit and '*crazy crown*' as a disturbingly cruel exposure of Blanche's insecurities regarding appearance and class, compounding Mitch's actions in the previous scene. There was critical understanding of the disturbing aspects, and importance of the stage directions, the ominous lines as Stanley '*walks into the bedroom*' and '*goes into the bathroom and closes the door*' dramatically invading Blanche's previous areas of sanctuary. Much was made of the disturbing aspects of rape insinuated though some candidates argued that there had been a sexual attraction between them from the start and tended to undermine the significance of this disturbing act. The interpretation of '*lurid reflections*' was very different. Some saw these as Blanche hallucinating, her past catching up with her, her separation from the truth and Stanley's presence as the '*menacing form*'.

Less successful answers featured extensive introductions retelling the plot and listing differences in class and background, but without relating these to the question or using supporting reference from the passage. Some wrote at length about William's life and family at the expense of writing about the actual extract and question. Attempts at exploring the dialogue and punctuation were perfunctory, with lists of the punctuation used, for example, exclamation marks and ellipsis but without understanding the context and effects achieved.

(b) There was much thoughtful discussion of Stella's character and clear expressions of feelings about her. Successful answers maintained a close focus on the question and used a range of precise textual references from across the whole text. Better answers showed a nuanced understanding of Stella's internal conflict, torn between loyalty to her sister and dependence on Stanley. They saw the difficult situation Stella was in and her divided loyalties with her marriage to Stanley ultimately winning. These candidates supported arguments with apt quotations, for example: '*I could not believe her story and go on living with Stanley*', and analysed language and stage directions to show how Williams presents Stella's denial and vulnerability. Others highlighted that Stella was drawn to the 'animalistic sexual desire' between her and Stanley as the reason for her staying, concluding that she cannot be pitied by the audience because she is making the same mistake of choosing Stanley over her sister, who had advised that they run away, which later led to Blanche's downfall.

Many candidates felt sympathy for Stella but some were critical of her leaving Belle Reve and Blanche. Some responses considered Stella's limited options as a woman with a young child, dependent on her husband's money (as she tells Blanche that he gave her more money after the assault), thus eliciting audience pity given the societal expectations for women in homes at that time. A woman without a husband and with a baby will be out of options. There was understanding of her feelings of guilt, and distress, at the end of the play but some were very critical of her and argued that this was short lived as Stanley promptly consoles her.

Weaker responses were one dimensional, often outraged by Stanley's treatment but repetitive and assertive, seeing her as a pitiful victim of domestic violence. Such answers lacked sufficient textual support to offer a nuanced appraisal of the character and the range of responses she evokes.

## WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *A Midsummer's Night Dream*

### Question 4

(a) In weaker responses showed some misconceptions about language and whether characters spoke in blank verse or prose. Understanding was insecure with many saying the courtiers spoke in blank verse and the mechanicals in prose, and some responses were built solely around this and how it portrayed their social status, rather than focusing on the actual performance and the courtiers' response to it. The most successful answers engaged with the passage with a clear awareness of its place in the play and its contribution to the resolution. They made relevant comments on the 'play within the play' although a few candidates wrote extensively about 'metatheatre' losing focus on the actual passage. There was effective comment on the chaotic and humorous performance of the mechanicals and the courtiers' interjections were generally understood to be rude and mocking but also encouraging in part.

There was a wide range of interpretations of Starveling's comment: '*All I have to say is to tell you ....*' with some saying he was standing up to the courtiers because of their interruptions whilst

others said that he was just trying to explain what he was doing and breaking both the fourth wall and his iambic meter. In terms of language, there was appropriate comment about Bottom's over-the-top performance with some candidates stating that he was a good actor. His monologue with its 'clunky rhymes', overuse of alliteration and oxymoron with his language more suited to the sun than the moon was often explored in detail. It was recognised that Pyramus is not interrupted, leading to Theseus and Hippolyta's more measured praise of his 'passion' that has held their attention.

The best answers explored the reversal of roles, where the courtiers are childish and unruly, versus the mechanicals' more formal, earnest manner and poetic form. They commented on the male courtiers' new unity and the silence of the female courtiers, Helena and Hermia, suggesting contentment or a restoration of 'order' and gender roles after their woodland release of emotion and voice. Some reflected on the submissive role of women at the time whilst recognising Hippolyta's higher status as the only female to join the male courtiers in commenting on the performance.

(b) The wording of the question, 'How far' Shakespeare's portrayal of the characters made the audience feel they deserved their happy ending gave candidates the opportunity to offer a balanced view, offering reasons they agreed or disagreed. The most successful answers took this approach and there were some effective comments on Demetrius and Lysander and the extent to which they deserved their happiness. They balanced the differences between the two men at the start of the play and their attitudes towards Hermia, with the chaos in the woods and resolution at the end where the two pairs of lovers are finally united. Lysander was generally seen as brave and loyal, fighting for his love. Even under the influence of the love potion, he was considered romantic. Demetrius was much criticised for his attitude towards Hermia at the start of the play as his 'right', his object. Some candidates were very critical of his treatment of Helena and the way he had changed from '*making love*' to her, to rejecting her. Many also felt that he had been very clear about his feelings to Helena and she was effectively 'stalking' him and felt some pity. The best answers were aware of the conventions of comedy and understood that the happy ending was inevitable, though some candidates argued that the ending was tempered by the fact that the juice sprinkled into the eyes of the characters by Puck had some bearing on the final outcome, and therefore there were some misgivings about whether not the characters' happiness was deserved.

Less successful answers treated them as almost the same character deserving of the same fate, or retold the plot with little reference to the question. Some omitted the events in the woods entirely and focused mainly on the beginning and the ending of the play. Characters were seen in simple terms, Lysander was loving so deserved his happiness but Demetrius being cruel to Helena did not. These answers lacked sufficient textual reference.

## WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Antony and Cleopatra*

### Question 5

(a) There were many insightful responses to both questions and it was clear that most candidates enjoyed writing about this play. Most were aware of the power struggles at play within the triumvirate, as well as the reconciliation with Pompey. Context was established with the celebration of the peace treaty between the triumvirs and Pompey and the jovial mood of celebration with the drunken behaviour, juxtaposed with the serious threat of murder and the triumvirs being oblivious of Menas's plot to kill them. The most successful answers referred accurately to significant moments and quotations, and were able to comment insightfully on character motivations, political power struggles, and thematic concerns such as loyalty, betrayal, and ambition. They engaged with the drama and considered Menas's repeated attempts to engage Pompey, including cryptic comments about him being '*lord of the whole world*' and how this raised curiosity in the audience. The number of asides and whispering was considered as dramatic as evidence of deception and secrets amongst these 'equals'.

Discussions around power were often strong, with many candidates noting Menas's belief that Pompey could become an '*earthly Jove*'. This was developed to demonstrate how Pompey, being slow to understand, '*what say'st thou?*', suggested he would not be an effective world leader or have the bravery to be a Jove. His 'twisted' sense of honour was also closely examined. These ideas were typically well integrated into arguments about the play's dramatic tension. Better responses explored the hypocrisy regarding Roman concepts of honour and where similar celebratory behaviour in Egypt was condemned. Antony's mind being still on Egypt was

recognised, together with Lepidus' drunken folly and Caesar's more controlled manner, signifying their flawed union and the instability of the triumvirate.

Many weaker responses ignored the opening 16 lines but focused on the interaction between Menas and Pompey. Those who did, struggled with the crocodile scene and there was a lot of confusion over how the triumvirs would be poisoned and that Antony is threatening Lepidus with 'quicksands'. There were some comments on the 'crocodile' and the alliteration without securing it to the demands of the question. Similarly, a discussion of the significance of serpents did not help to meet the requirements of the question. However, most recognised what Menas was offering Pompey and his reasons for declining, considering him honourable, but without considering his final lines. There was a range of interpretations of the crocodile exchange but few understood Antony's nonsensical humour and the deeper implications of what this revealed about Lepidus.

(b) Most answers had plenty to say about the many facets to Cleopatra's character. The more successful responses engaged with the wording of the question, particularly the word 'fascinating' and explored how fascination was created rather than just stating she was 'fascinating'. They considered Enobarbus's description of her allure and understood how her royal status is conveyed through the throne, purple, servants and authority, and how she is so attractive not only to people, but also to nature itself, the water and the wind. All candidates explored her relationship with Antony and how this conveyed her manipulative nature. The most successful answers selected their material well from across the text and selected the different sides to Cleopatra: her appearance and how her beauty eclipses the goddess Venus; the intensity of her love; how she manipulates Antony; how her ships flee battle at Actium and her regained nobility at her exotic death.

The best answers considered her swift mood swings and how she symbolises Egypt – the luxury, the exotic and leisure – in contrast to Rome's logic, discipline and restraint. Cleopatra's portrayal as a lover juxtaposing this with the Cleopatra, 'the leader of men' who had ultimate confidence in her actions away from her relationships with men.

Less successful answers focused more on Antony and considered his actions rather than Cleopatra's character. Most of the discussion centred around her control of Antony and what he gave up for her, demonstrating knowledge but without linking this to the question. Some made sweeping assertions without supporting textual reference, for example, she manipulates Antony, betrays Antony or 'she represents Egypt'.

# LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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**Paper 2010/23**

**Drama**

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