

# LITERATURE (ENGLISH) (US)

Paper 0427/01

Poetry and Prose

## Key messages

- Responses must answer the specific question set for either the extract or the essay and focus on this throughout.
- Effective and sustained analysis of language is essential, particularly in the poetry and passage-based questions.
- Detailed support from the text, either by short quotations or well-chosen references to words or phrases, is essential in all questions.
- Responses should show detailed knowledge of the text by ranging across the whole extract or poem in the passage-based questions and across as much of the novel or short story as is relevant in the essay questions. Responses to the extract questions should also show knowledge of the context and some reference to the wider text.
- Candidates need to present a developed and well-structured response to the question.

## General comments

Many candidates showed an encouraging engagement with the poems or prose text studied. Many students do, however, need to frame a developed and analytical response; some show a tendency to drop too readily into description, narrative or repeating the same points. There was frequently interesting and strong personal response, and this is to be encouraged, but quite often this was at the expense of a discussion of the details of language in the extract, which must always be the primary focus of any response and the key to higher marks.

Some candidates make a really promising beginning, with two or three relevant points, clearly explained and supported by the text, but then fail to take things further. Students should be helped to learn how to develop their points and consider the wide range of ideas available for analysis and discussion in each passage and essay. Responses should ideally range across the whole poem, extract or text, within the limits of the time given.

Passage-based questions on all texts were far more popular than the essay questions. These questions require a response which analyses the writing and language while remaining focused on the particular question. Often a brief reference or introduction to the context of the passage is helpful or, usually, necessary, but this should not be a lengthy retelling of narrative which occurs before and after the passage; this inevitably loses focus on the question and on the language of the extract. However, a good response will place the passage within the novel; this will enable a consideration of how characters or situations change, for example, and enable judgments to be made about the significance of the passage and how it will affect what happens afterwards.

Focus on language remains the single most important discriminator between the mark bands and is still the area in which many candidates struggle. For credit to be given for language points, candidates need to look at specific words or phrases, selecting pertinent words or short quotations. This is covered in the mark scheme by 'the way the writer uses language' or 'the way the writer achieves effects'. It is not sufficient just to identify figures of speech or important words without saying how and why these are appropriate and effective. Knowing the terminology of literary criticism without being able to apply it sensibly and effectively will not help the students to present a successful response. In the same way, generalised comments such as 'he uses diction and imagery to put his point across' without identifying the words and figures of speech or

sometimes even the point, do not in themselves demonstrate any understanding, so cannot gain any credit for the candidate.

Quite often responses are trying to consider language used by the writer but instead fall into the 'supporting reference to the text' category of the mark scheme. This often shows knowledge and understanding of the text, and is sometimes an appropriate choice, but tends to be a much longer quotation covering several lines of poetry or a longer sentence. These can have their place in an answer (though the rule is invariably 'the shorter the better'), but candidates who only select these lengthier references without also considering specific word choice and effects can only achieve marks in the lower bands. In the same way, large sections of narrative or description, also common, very often do show some knowledge, but will not be given very many marks on their own. It is worth emphasising that consideration of the language used by the writer and its effects is just as applicable to the essay question. Some short pertinent quotations which have been learnt by heart will generally be useful and there is no substitute for this.

A few candidates tried to answer the essay question by using the extract or by conflating both questions as if they were one. The essay questions always stand alone and should be considered as a completely separate question to the extract. It would be helpful for candidates to be made familiar with the layout of the exam paper and the choices offered before encountering the real thing in order to avoid this kind of error.

There were, regrettably, some responses which suggested that candidates were unfamiliar with the poem or passage on the exam paper and were seeing it for the first time. This particularly applied to the poetry section where there were several examples of misunderstanding or questionable interpretation. The fact that the poem is there in front of the candidate, and therefore does not have to be 'learnt', should not lead to complacency or a belief that it does not need to be studied and discussed beforehand. Those students who had had the opportunity to spend time with others discussing possible interpretations and use of language were clearly distinguishable and, inevitably, gained much higher marks.

## **Comments on specific questions**

### **Section A: POETRY**

from LIZ ROSENBERG and DEENA NOVEMBER ed: *I Just Hope It's Lethal*

#### **Question 1: One Art**

Stronger responses were able to understand the growing seriousness of the things 'lost' and that we all lose things, though these are hopefully trivial, such as keys. Few were able to consider the less tangible suggestions, such as 'the hour badly spent' and how it is possible to 'lose' rivers and a continent. Most candidates considered the final stanza as evidence of the more serious tone, as it talks about 'losing you' but many misinterpreted 'the joking voice, a gesture I love' as referring to the speaker rather than the person who has been lost. The best responses considered the repetition of 'The art of losing isn't hard to master' and attempted to make sense of the final line and its impact. Few were able to convincingly express how the deceptively cheerful tone masks a sense of sadness and regret.

#### **Question 2: A Sad Child**

On the whole, candidates struggled with this poem, suggesting that not many had studied it and discussed possible interpretations beforehand. Most were able to express how a child often feels sad and that there are ways of dealing with this which can vary from the medical to buying something or taking up a hobby. Few considered the viewpoint of the speaker or what had actually happened (in stanza 3) to cause this particular child to feel sad. It would have been helpful to look at the final italicised line of that stanza to focus on the particular rather than just on 'sadness' in general, and this would have given answers more structure. There were a range of interpretations to the final two stanzas but none which fully understood these as referring to a person's final moments and so how, eventually, these trivial moments of sadness will not matter.

## ***Songs of Ourselves Volume 2, Parts 3 and 5***

### **Question 3: *The Instant of My Death***

All candidates understood that the poem is about a journey on a bus which is uncomfortable, and most responses considered the unwelcome situation of being trapped next to the 'fat man' for such a long time. Most were able to talk about the tedious length of the journey and many pointed to the imagery of 'wheels and hours grinding, tripping' to show this. Fewer went on to consider the unexpected shock of the boy or the metaphor describing him as 'a black-eyed bean' followed by the shock of 'shot me'. The best responses recognised the importance of this, placed at the end of the fifth stanza so that readers would take it at face value, but few then followed this up with the anti-climax of 'with a toy gun' in the run-on line in the next stanza. This could have been effectively linked to the title of the poem. There was some effective personal response linking 'cracked open an apple' with the start of the speaker's new life following her 'near-death' experience and her journey into the unknown.

### **Question 4: *The Migrant***

Most candidates expressed a strong personal response to the plight of the woman, and the misery of believing 'she was home' only to find out that 'she was merely in transit' for 'some other destination'. The sense of her lack of power over her own future and how her relief and optimism were misplaced were considered by the better responses, possibly helped by the migrant crises across the world which are so prominent currently. Most responses also identified how she was afraid and alone: 'fearful and unutterably lonely'. None tackled the identity of the narrator who was watching her and 'shuffling forward in the queue', showing that others are in the same predicament, with the wider symbolism of migration.

## **Section B: PROSE**

### **LAURIE HALSE ANDERSON: *Chains***

#### **Questions 5 and 6:**

Candidates have clearly enjoyed this novel and **Question 5** was a popular choice, with some good responses which showed engagement with the text and, in particular, with Isabel's awful predicament.

Most knew the context of the extract, how Isabel has lost Ruth, has been beaten and is now at the mercy of Madam Lockton, who is determined to inflict the worst possible punishment on her. The best responses looked at the imagery and language used to portray her as a powerless victim who is 'lost' in an impossible situation with no-one to speak for her, told from her own viewpoint, making her trial so much more hard-hitting. Many wrote about Madam Lockton's manipulation of the judge, with her lies and false tears, including the metaphor of her words as 'flies caught in a spider's web', though this was less successfully handled. The best responses considered the sudden closure of the brief trial with the sound of the gavel, as if it all means very little to anyone there, who do not see a young girl about to have her life ruined.

Very few attempted **Question 6**, but those who did were able to provide some suitable examples of Isabel's love and care for her sister. These responses would have been improved by some quotation from the text, for example her statements that 'I promised Momma I would take care of Ruth' and 'I would have killed whoever tried to take her from me.'

### **BARBARA KINGSOLVER: *The Bean Trees***

#### **Questions 7 and 8**

Responses to **Question 7** were split between those who clearly knew the text well and were able to place the extract exactly in its context and those who were seemingly encountering the story for the first time. The latter were not able to name either Taylor or Turtle and just made general comments about how surprising it would be to be given a baby so unexpectedly, which is undoubtedly true but lacks knowledge and understanding of the text.

Better responses unpicked Taylor's dilemma and the fact that she was given so little time to make a decision and so few options. The best candidates were able to use the quotation 'I could have had babies coming out of my ears by now' to show the irony of her position so soon after leaving home to avoid precisely that fate. Her indecision, the closure of the bar and her 'foggy' brain means that the decision ends up being made for her, becoming the defining moment in Taylor's life (and Turtle's). Some responses also considered the brief

and unhelpful conversation between Taylor and the woman which has such huge consequences and the short sentences which have such impact: 'It was a child' and 'Take this baby.'

There were too few responses seen to **Question 8** for meaningful comment.

**COLM TOIBIN:** *Brooklyn*

**EDITH WHARTON:** *Ethan Frome*

## STORIES OF OURSELVES

### Questions 9 to 14

Perhaps surprisingly, there were too few responses for meaningful comment on any of these texts. Again, those seen suggested that candidates were unfamiliar with the text, so they were not able to show understanding of the extract or question. They therefore were only able to achieve marks in the lowest levels of the Mark Scheme.

# LITERATURE (ENGLISH) (US)

Paper 0427/02

Drama

## Key messages

When answering passage-based questions, candidates need to establish the context, and address the question over three or four developed points.

Successful answers to discursive questions focus on the question and support points with detailed and relevant references to the text.

Candidates improve their answers by making a response to the dramatic qualities of the text, such as interaction between characters, staging and dramatic tension.

## General comments

This is the last sitting for this paper, and there were fewer entries than in previous years. The majority of candidates chose to answer a passage-based question, with the best showing a good knowledge of the text and a clear understanding of the characters and their situations. There were some individual personal responses, often critical of Hally's superior attitude to Sam in '*Master Harold'...and the Boys*'. Most candidates felt the breakdown of Biff's relationship with his father, Willy, to be upsetting in *Death of a Salesman*, because Biff, who previously idolised his father, now feels betrayed by the discovery of his father's affair. Writing on *Romeo and Juliet*, candidates readily explored the moving moment as Romeo leaves a reluctant Juliet at the break of day to go into exile. Successful answers showed how their personal responses were encouraged by the authors through their writing.

The strongest answers began by briefly establishing the context of the passage, so that the significance of the passage was clear. They continued by making three or four main points in answer to the question and supported each one by detailed reference to the text, usually in the form of brief quotations, with analysis of the text to show how the quotation linked to the point being made and also to the question. The strongest answers evaluated how successfully the authors communicated with their audience, by making a response to features of drama such as the interaction between characters. Thus, they might consider, for example, how a character's attitude to others is conveyed through how they speak, the words they use, their actions and their tone of voice; sometimes stage directions were helpful here.

Candidates who answer discursive questions need to select apt material from the whole play to support their points. They need to make clear how the text supports the point they are making, and how that links to the question, rather than narrating events without analysis. Good answers addressed the question directly and focused on its key words and phrases such as 'movingly portrays', 'strikingly portray', 'the relationship between [characters]', or 'similarities between [characters]'. Candidates with a clear overview of the text were able to comment on the significance of the character or theme within the play as a whole.

The rubric for the paper asks candidates to answer one question, and nearly all candidates followed this instruction. When more than one question was attempted, each answer was undeveloped and often showed incomplete understanding of the text and question. If there was more than one answer, each answer was marked, but only one mark, the highest, was awarded to the candidate.

### **Comments on specific questions**

#### **ATHOL FUGARD: 'Master Harold' ...and the Boys**

##### **Question 1**

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

##### **Question 2**

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

#### **ARTHUR MILLER: *Death of a Salesman***

##### **Question 3**

Good answers established the context; Willy is away from home on a sales trip, when Biff comes to see him to tell him he has failed maths and so will not graduate. He wants Willy to persuade his maths teacher to pass him. Most answers made clear that the passage is upsetting because of Biff's shock as he understands the relationship between his father and The Woman. Some candidates pointed out that the relationship can't be hidden, because of how dramatically she appears without clothes and speaks intimately to Willy. Biff's initial reaction – 'horrified', 'staring open-mouthed' and the fact that he 'slowly sits down' shows that he is shocked and it takes time for him to process what he's seen, as his hero-worship of his father is destroyed. Many candidates saw that the sordid argument over the stockings is key in helping Biff to feel Willy's betrayal of the family, because of their significance as a present for Linda. Stronger answers also explored Willy's initial response to Biff; that he typically lies and says she's just using his shower; then his excuse of being lonely and the drama of his ineffectual threats to 'beat' and 'whip' Biff. As always, he pretends nothing has happened, and Willy says he will see Biff's maths teacher tomorrow for him. Perceptive answers developed their response to consider the significance for Biff of the revelation about Willy; his father's betrayal makes him forget about graduation and going to college, so it changes his whole future. Stronger answers explored how the impact on Biff is dramatically portrayed by his weeping and accusing Willy of being a liar. Some answers limited their comments to the first page of the passage, thus missing Biff's reaction to Willy. Others lost a strict focus on the passage and question and spent too long at the start retelling how Biff failed maths despite extra tuition and why he expected Willy to 'fix things' because he is 'well-liked'.

##### **Question 4**

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

#### **WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Romeo and Juliet***

##### **Question 5**

Good answers began by establishing the context; Romeo and Juliet are married; the Nurse brought Romeo to Juliet in secret so they could spend the night together before Romeo goes into exile. Most candidates pointed out that this situation itself is moving. They considered the lovers' reluctance to part, despite it being morning and dangerous for Romeo to stay. Stronger answers explored how this is conveyed through the lovers changing their stance: with first one, then the other reluctant for Romeo to leave. Stronger answers also responded to the natural imagery movingly used by the lovers to indicate whether it is still night or day; whether they could hear nightingales or larks singing, or whether the sky is still dark, or the sun is rising. Few candidates commented on the Nurse's dramatic interruption; this reminds the lovers of the danger Romeo is in if discovered, and prompts his departure. Many answers explored the moving last words of the lovers to each other. Juliet wonders whether they will ever meet again, and Romeo is certain they will and gives reassurance – but candidates often pointed out the sense of foreboding created, since we know that the next time Romeo sees Juliet, she is, tragically, apparently dead in the crypt. Some candidates misplaced the passage, putting it immediately after the two lovers had met at the ball. Others referred to parts of the text, but their understanding of it was not secure.

##### **Question 6**

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

# LITERATURE (ENGLISH) (US)

Paper 0427/03

Coursework

## Key messages

Successful responses:

- show a detailed knowledge of texts
- focus explicitly on the task set
- use relevant, concise references to support analysis
- analyse in detail ways in which writers achieve their effects.

Less successful responses:

- have only a basic knowledge of surface meanings
- lose focus on the task
- make unsupported assertions
- list techniques without analysing precise ways in which writers achieve their effects.

## General comments

There was much evidence of coursework of a high standard this session, where candidates showed a personal and evaluative engagement with texts. There was much evidence that candidates had enjoyed studying their coursework texts and had taken the opportunity to develop their skills of researching, drafting and presenting their assignments.

The most successful assignments sustained a clear focus on a carefully worded task which enabled candidates to meet the requirements of the highest levels. It is important that tasks direct candidates to analyse ways in which writers achieve their effects. Where tasks did not do this, candidates tended to treat characters as real-life people (rather than fictional or dramatic constructs). Guidance on effective task-setting can be found in the Coursework Handbook.

Some less successful responses showed a detailed knowledge of the text, though lacked a clear focus on the task. Some candidates were intent on listing themes they had studied, though with an inconsistent focus on the task. It is worthwhile repeating the guidance to teachers that they remind students of the importance of selecting material in a way that directly addresses the task set; every sentence should contribute to the relevance of the unfolding argument. This skill will help them in their preparation for the examination papers.

As in previous sessions, the most convincing and persuasive essays sustained a critical engagement with the ways in which writers achieve their effects (Assessment Objective 3), relating their points to the task. Some poetry assignments logged features such as alliteration, caesura, enjambment and ABAB rhyme schemes in poetry essays though without exploring how the writer uses these devices to convey their ideas. A key message for candidates approaching their assignments in this way is that feature logging is not the same as critical analysis.

Several centres submitted empathic responses, with the necessary information supplied: the name of the character and the precise moment in the text that the interior monologue takes place. The most successful responses captured a convincingly authentic voice for the chosen character and moment. Candidates should be permitted to select their own character and moment for empathic responses to encourage personal responses to texts.

## Guidance for teachers

It is important that centres comply with the requirements of the Coursework folder, which are set out in the syllabus. For example, assignments must:

- select from the whole prose or drama text (and not focus exclusively on individual chapters or scenes)
- be based on texts that have the same level of demand as IGCSE set texts.

Guidance on task-setting can be found in the Coursework Handbook, which stresses the importance of **(a)** wording tasks that direct candidates explicitly to explore the ways in which writers achieve their effects and **(b)** avoiding insufficiently challenging command words such as 'Describe' and 'Explain'. Teachers within the centre should together discuss the appropriateness of proposed tasks before they are given to candidates. This enables any problems with proposed tasks to be resolved before it is too late.

There follows a reminder of what constitutes good practice in the presentation of coursework folders:

- Start each assignment with the full wording of the task. In the case of empathic responses, the chosen character and moment should be clearly stated. This is important since it allows the moderator to determine how successfully the candidate has addressed the task.
- Use focused ticking in the body of the text to indicate valid and thoughtful points, together with concise marginal and summative comments which relate to the wording of the levels descriptors. This provides information to the external moderator about how the final mark was arrived at. Avoid words such as 'superficial', 'thin', 'brilliant' and 'wow' which do not feature in the level descriptors.
- Provide a brief explanation on the assignment itself or on the cover sheet in cases where marks are changed during internal moderation. Such purposeful annotation aids transparency and contributes to the robustness of the assessment as it allows a centre to justify its award of marks. In some cases, the original teacher's marks were more accurate than the internal moderator's.

The following examples of unhelpful annotation should be avoided: excessive ticking (for example, of every paragraph or every line); hyperbolic praise of work of indifferent quality; labelling by assessment objective. Simply putting the supposed relevant AO in the margin is of very little benefit to any subsequent reader, as it does not reveal the *extent* to which a particular assessment objective has been addressed; instead, more specific reference should be made to the wording of the levels descriptors.

Most centres carried out administration efficiently, using the current version of the Individual Record Card, and securing it by treasury tag or staple to allow easy access to candidate work. In well-administered centres, care had been taken to:

- include all candidates on the Coursework Assessment Summary Form
- transcribe totals accurately across the various documents.

All centres are advised to include a final clerical checking stage in their moderation procedures before submitting their paperwork to Cambridge. This check should be carried out by a different person from the one who completed the Coursework Assessment Summary Forms and Mark Sheets originally.