

WORLD LITERATURE

Paper 0408/01

Coursework

Key messages

- Teachers should refer to the 0408 Syllabus and Coursework Handbook during the planning stages of the course.
- Centres should refer to the Cambridge policy on preventing plagiarism and the use of generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) in coursework. Any AI generated material must be acknowledged and identified.
- Texts selected for study should be of equal literary demand to those on the set text list and suggested texts for coursework given in the syllabus.
- Tasks for all assignments must be worded to enable candidates to fulfil the requirements of the level descriptors and be written clearly at the start of each assignment.
- Written assignments should include focused ticking and marginal annotation by the teacher which comment on strengths and weaknesses of candidate performance and should be clearly linked to the marking criteria.
- Candidate work should be securely fastened with the Individual Candidate Record Card attached at the front, and presented without plastic folders.

General comments

The observations in this general report should be read alongside the individual report to the centre.

Centres are reminded that the word count guidance in the 0408 syllabus states that Critical essays should be between 800–1200 words (including quotations but not reference/bibliography); Empathic essays should be between 600–1000. Assignments which go beyond the advised word count may be self-penalising.

The Critical Response

Most candidates knew and understood the texts studied well and conveyed their enjoyment of the texts studied. The best responses remained focused on a well-formulated task which allowed them to meet the criteria for the higher levels of the mark scheme. These responses demonstrated an evaluative and personal engagement with the texts and candidates could quote confidently from the text, applying their knowledge to the questions and structuring their argument effectively.

Less successful responses often used lengthy quotations without linking these references closely to the question or exploring the text. These responses were often narrative or explanatory in approach lacking textual detail to support ideas and a response to the ways the writer creates effects. Personal responses should be firmly rooted in the text and not speculative in approach. The use of textual references to support a narrative overview of a text is unlikely to achieve high reward as textual references should be fully explored to demonstrate understanding of the ways the writer achieves effects.

For candidates to be able to meet the assessment criteria in their writing, effective tasks must be set. Examples of appropriately challenging tasks can be found in the 0408 Coursework Handbook.

The Empathic Response

The most successful responses focused on a specific character and moment in the text, offering an engagingly authentic ‘voice’ for the chosen character. The full assignment was written clearly at the top of the first page of responses. These responses were firmly rooted in the text avoiding speculative or creative possibilities for their chosen character.

Less successful responses did not focus on a precise moment and were often creative in approach rather than being firmly based on the text. Often these involved some retelling of the plot rather than conveying the thoughts and feelings of the chosen character as presented in the text. Dialogue and quotations from texts are not required. Examples of good empathic tasks are given in the 0408 Coursework Handbook.

Teacher annotation

Too often candidate work showed no evidence of having been marked. Teachers are reminded that all assignments should have focused ticking of key points, supported by brief reference to the level descriptors in marginal annotation and a detailed summative comment, to assist the moderation process. It should be clear to the moderator precisely what is being rewarded and how it meets the marking criteria for the final mark awarded. Labelling Assessment Objectives (AOs) in the margin of candidate work is not helpful to the moderation process as there is no indication of the extent to which an Assessment Objective has been met. Similarly, simply copying out the full level descriptors, assessing each AO individually is unlikely to arrive at an appropriate mark for a response. The AOs should be assessed holistically weighing up the strengths and weaknesses of a response and how best it fits the level criteria. Summative comments should be taken from the same level as the final mark awarded to reflect the qualities of a response.

There should be clear evidence of internal moderation in centres of more than one teacher, and changes in marks should be justified with additional comments and marks accurately transferred to the cover sheet, Centre Assessment Summary Form and the MS1. Rigorous clerical checks should be in place to ensure that marks are correctly transcribed at all stages. Written communication, spelling, punctuation and grammar are not assessed in the coursework and should not be commented on, or taken into account when the final mark for an assignment is awarded.

Administration

Care should be taken over the presentation of the portfolios. The Individual Record Card should be fastened securely (e.g., by a treasury tag or staple) to the written assignments (and not placed in plastic wallets, cardboard folders or envelopes) to ensure ease of access. Assignments should be organised in the order presented on the Individual Record Card.

WORLD LITERATURE

Paper 0408/21
Unseen Poetry

Key messages

The strongest candidates tend to be ones who:

- quote aptly from the poem
- keep the essay focused on the terms of the question
- introduce their essay with a focus on the question and an overview of the poem
- develop their essays over about 2 sides for each question.

General comments

The poem for Paper 21 was 'Horses' by Pablo Neruda. This year, Examiners noted that most responses were detailed, and that there were fewer instances of shorter, self-limiting work. Candidates tended to develop their analysis of the poem in response to the question, and there was a greater degree of insight into deeper meanings.

There was again a pleasing ability to quote aptly from the poem, and Examiners noted that most candidates showed the ability to tackle an unseen poem in an organised essay, often with thoughtful insight. Many candidates developed a careful response that focused on the key areas of the question and the unseen poem. There was evidence of good reading skills and many answers were thoughtful, selecting useful material from the poem and developing consideration of a range of effects – including, in the better responses, the impact of poetic features such as rhythm, enjambement and caesura. Shorter responses tended to limit themselves to Level 1 and 2 attainment, but that was the exception rather than the norm.

As noted last year, many candidates would do well to think carefully about how their essays were introduced. Better responses started with a paragraph which directly addressed the terms of the question, rather than simply listing techniques used by the poet. Carefully referencing the question usually led to more focused essays with a better grasp of the poem.

Once again, candidates are advised not to concentrate solely on the language of the poem and rather encouraged to address poetic form and structure. Better responses integrated careful consideration of the effects of poetic features in relation to the question and to the construction of 'meaning' by the poet.

Examiners also felt that often the title of the poems was overlooked. However, those candidates who made a pertinent reference to the title and linked it to the question often produced a thoughtful, focused response.

This year, like last, most candidates gave equal consideration to both parts of the question. There were very few uneven responses in terms of length and time management seemed to be handled well by most candidates who typically wrote about two sides for each essay.

More successful responses explored some deeper meanings of the poems – a key discriminator to access higher mark levels. Personal responses supported with well-selected references to the poem helped many candidates achieve marks in Levels 4 and 5. However, some Examiners cautioned that in the pursuit of an alternative or hidden meaning in the poems some candidates were so determined to find 'an alternative' meaning or interpretation that they lost sight of the question and, on some occasions, did not answer it. Some of the interpretations had credibility but quite a few were 'forced' and unconvincing. Some of the personal responses went off at tangents and had no bearing on the text.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

(a) In what ways does the poet vividly describe the horses?

Stronger responses opened with a sharp contrast between the poem's 'empty arena' and the insistent repetition of 'stepping, stepping,' showing how that echoing refrain brings the horses to vibrant life. They went on to unpack the simile 'rippled into existence like flame,' suggesting not only brightness but a bold, almost dangerous energy, and then traced how the poet extends the fire motif—through words such as 'flame...flaming,' 'oranges...amber...fire'—to convey both beauty and latent threat. Examining the metaphor 'they stepped like 10 gods,' they linked 'faultless' with the richly sensual 'amber and honey' to imply divine strength and perfection, while the image of 'manes recalling a dream of salt spray' drew on oceanic wildness to underline the horses' untamed spirit. Attentive readers highlighted the sense of a wilful, uncontrollable force in the phrase 'pride...furious eyes...a prisoner inside them.' Finally, the most discerning analyses focused on the climactic cluster—'the unwitting fountain, the dance of gold, the sky, the fire that sprang to life'—as a summative burst of elemental beauty and power.

In contrast, weaker answers tended to fall back on straightforward paraphrase—summarising instead of engaging with the poet's language. Many simply listed devices such as simile, metaphor etc. without explaining the effect those choices have on the reader, and several responses relied on long quotations and hence missed out on analysing how the poet's word choices and carefully woven imagery build an escalating sense of motion and force when describing the horses.

(b) How does the poet strikingly convey the impact that seeing the horses has on him?

Stronger answers opened by highlighting the poet's stifled world—'From the window...' and 'the light was without light, the sky skyless'—to establish his initial dullness, then unpacked the simile 'The air was white like a moistened loaf' to convey a sense of bland, suffocating sameness. They showed how the 'deserted arena' and the metaphor of a 'circle bitten out by the teeth of winter' intensify the cruelty of his existence before the horses arrive, and they traced the moment of sudden awakening in 'they filled the whole world of my eyes, empty till now,' arguing that this overwhelming, perhaps hyperbolic shift marks a profound transformation. By contrasting 'dirty, disgruntled winter' with the horses' 'intense presence was blood, was rhythm,' they explained how the animals inject new life and movement into the speaker's world.

Attentive analyses also noted the repetition and tense shift in 'I saw, I saw, and seeing I came to life...' and the stark power of the final two one-line stanzas, where simple, declarative language underscores the permanence of his rebirth.

Weaker responses relied on paraphrase without examining how specific language choices create the striking impact. Some identified devices such as repetition or metaphor but failed to link them to the question's focus and many overlooked key structural features—repetition, tense shifts and abrupt stanza breaks—that underpin the poem's emotional climax and give it lasting resonance.

WORLD LITERATURE

Paper 0408/22
Unseen Poetry

Key messages

The strongest candidates tend to be ones who:

- quote aptly from the poem
- keep the essay focused on the terms of the question
- introduce their essay with a focus on the question and an overview of the poem
- develop their essays over about 2 sides for each question.

General comments

The poem for Paper 22 was 'The Surfer' by Judith Wright. This year, Examiners noted that most responses were detailed, and that there were fewer instances of shorter, self-limiting work. Candidates tended to develop their analysis of the poem in response to the question, and there was a greater degree of insight into deeper meanings.

There was again a pleasing ability to quote aptly from the poem, and Examiners noted that most candidates showed the ability to tackle an unseen poem in an organised essay, often with thoughtful insight. Many candidates developed a careful response that focused on the key areas of the question and the unseen poem. There was evidence of good reading skills and many answers were thoughtful, selecting useful material from the poem and developing consideration of a range of effects – including, in the better responses, the impact of poetic features such as rhythm, enjambement and caesura. Shorter responses tended to limit themselves to Level 1 and 2 attainment, but that was the exception rather than the norm.

As noted last year, many candidates would do well to think carefully about how their essays were introduced. Better responses started with a paragraph which directly addressed the terms of the question, rather than simply listing techniques used by the poet. Carefully referencing the question usually led to more focused essays with a better grasp of the poem.

Once again, candidates are advised not to concentrate solely on the language of the poem and rather encouraged to address poetic form and structure. Better responses integrated careful consideration of the effects of poetic features in relation to the question and to the construction of 'meaning' by the poet.

Examiners also felt that often the title of the poems was overlooked. However, those candidates who did make a pertinent reference to the title and linked it to the question often produced a thoughtful, focused response.

This year, like last, most candidates gave equal consideration to both parts of the question. There were very few uneven responses in terms of length and time management seemed to be handled well by most candidates who typically wrote about two sides for each essay.

More successful responses explored some deeper meanings of the poems – a key discriminator to access higher mark levels. Personal responses supported by apt reference to the poem helped many candidates achieve marks in Levels 4 and 5. However, some Examiners cautioned that in the pursuit of an alternative or hidden meaning in the poems some candidates were so determined to find 'an alternative' meaning or interpretation that they lost sight of the question and, on some occasions, did not answer it. Some of the interpretations had credibility but quite a few were 'forced' and unconvincing. Some of the personal responses went off at tangents and had no bearing on the text.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

(a) How does the poet vividly portray the surfer in the first stanza?

Stronger answers went beyond mere identification of literary devices to show how the poet's language brings the surfer vividly to life. They examined the dynamic verb 'thrust' in 'thrust his joy against the weight of the sea' to capture both the surfer's exhilaration and the ocean's resistance, and they unpacked the striking metaphor 'muscle of arm ... muscle of water' to suggest a symbiotic relationship between human strength and natural force. Many commented on the oxymoronic triplet 'mortal, masterful, frail,' noting how it encapsulates the surfer's simultaneous vulnerability and mastery, and they wove in the simile 'the gulls went wheeling in air as he in water, with delight' to show how circular motion evokes boundless freedom.

A few of the most perceptive candidates even read this celebration of the surfing moment as a broader metaphor for living fully and embracing life's challenges—just as the surfer dances with danger yet finds joy in each wave.

Lots of candidates identified that the surfer was enjoying being in the sea. The reference to 'hawthorn hedges in spring, thorns in the face stinging' was more problematic. Some candidates avoided it altogether with some unhelpful interpretations which went into the realms of sea monsters and the supernatural. Stronger responses identified it as being the water/waves/salt water and made relevant points about the surfer's endurance and willingness to experience some pain/discomfort in the pursuit of his hobby/experience.

By contrast, weaker responses either narrated events instead of analysing language, listed techniques without explaining their effects such as alliteration or simile, or relied on lengthy quotations—often truncated with ellipses—so that the evidence no longer clearly supported their points.

(b) How does the poet strikingly convey the power of the sea in the second and third stanzas?

Stronger answers began by noting the abrupt shift in tone brought about by the direct address, 'Turn home, the sun goes down; swimmer, turn home.' They showed how this imperative, repeated with insistent brevity, instantly transforms the sea from a playground into a perilous force, warning of impending danger. These candidates then moved on to analyse the vivid metaphor in 'the grey-wolf sea lies, snarling,' demonstrating how the sea becomes a predatory creature, crouched to spring on its prey.

Good responses explored the grotesque detail of 'splits the waves' hair and shows the bones they worry in their wolf-teeth,' arguing that the image peels back the waves' façade of beauty to reveal their hidden menace. Finally, they drew attention to the stanzas' relentless rhythm—'drops there and snatches again, drops and again snatches'—showing how the repeated verbs echo the merciless, cyclical motion of the waves and reinforce the poem's overall sense of unremitting threat.

By contrast, less convincing responses fell back on narrative summary, paraphrasing the warning instead of engaging with specific language. Others identified devices—'This is personification,' 'Here is repetition'—but failed to explain how those techniques produce a 'striking' sense of power. Many simply overlooked the crucial tonal contrast with the first stanza, treating all three stanzas alike and thereby missing the way the poet engineers a sudden shift from exhilaration to menace.

WORLD LITERATURE

Paper 0408/23
Unseen Poetry

Key messages

The strongest candidates tend to be ones who:

- quote aptly from the poem
- keep the essay focused on the terms of the question
- introduce their essay with a focus on the question and an overview of the poem
- develop their essays over about 2 sides for each question.

General comments

The poem for Paper 23 was 'Anger' by Nikita Gill. This year, Examiners noted that most responses were detailed, and that there were fewer instances of shorter, self-limiting work. Candidates tended to develop their analysis of the poem in response to the question, and there was a greater degree of insight into deeper meanings.

There was again a pleasing ability to quote aptly from the poem, and Examiners noted that most candidates showed the ability to tackle an unseen poem in an organised essay, often with thoughtful insight. Many candidates developed a careful response that focused on the key areas of the question and the unseen poem. There was evidence of good reading skills and many answers were thoughtful, selecting useful material from the poem and developing consideration of a range of effects – including, in the better responses, the impact of poetic features such as rhythm, enjambement and caesura. Shorter responses tended to limit themselves to Level 1 and 2 attainment, but that was the exception rather than the norm.

As noted last year, many candidates would do well to think carefully about how their essays were introduced. Better responses started with a paragraph which directly addressed the terms of the question, rather than simply listing techniques used by the poet. Carefully referencing the question usually led to more focused essays with a better grasp of the poem.

Once again, candidates are advised not to concentrate solely on the language of the poem and rather encouraged to address poetic form and structure. Better responses integrated careful consideration of the effects of poetic features in relation to the question and to the construction of 'meaning' by the poet.

Examiners also felt that often the title of the poems was overlooked. However, those candidates who did make a pertinent reference to the title and linked it to the question often produced a thoughtful, focused response.

This year, like last, most candidates gave equal consideration to both parts of the question. There were very few uneven responses in terms of length and time management seemed to be handled well by most candidates who typically wrote about two sides for each essay.

More successful responses explored some deeper meanings of the poems – a key discriminator to access higher mark levels. Personal responses supported by apt reference to the poem helped many candidates achieve marks in Levels 4 and 5. However, some Examiners cautioned that in the pursuit of an alternative or hidden meaning in the poems some candidates were so determined to find 'an alternative' meaning or interpretation that they lost sight of the question and, on some occasions, did not answer it. Some of the interpretations had credibility but quite a few were 'forced' and unconvincing. Some of the personal responses went off at tangents and had no bearing on the text.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

(a) How does the poet vividly portray anger in the first two stanzas?

Most responses noted the powerful use of the simile, with its charged, demonic reference, and then explored the extended comparison. Such responses referenced the direct address of 'your insides' which made the poem even more engaging, as well as placing the reader in the role of victim, with the tactile and animalistic effect of 'claws at your insides' even more disconcerting.

More candidates might have picked up on the anaphoric impact of the conditional 'if' and the sense of cause and effect – that it is up to the reader whether or not they harbour such anger and resentment.

Many candidates did explore the use of powerful diction such as 'terrorise' and 'prisoner' and linked such discussion to the presentation of anger and its vivid portrayal. More candidates might have explored the irony of the poet's use of free verse when presenting the stranglehold it might have on the subject of the poem, or noted the tension between the loose structure of repeated six-line stanzas with the tight grip of unrelenting anger.

(b) How does the poet strikingly present ways of managing strong emotions in the final two stanzas?

Stronger responses focused on the terms of the question, and discussed ways of managing strong emotions by juxtaposing the 'fiend', 'this cruel thing' with the more heroic, human sense of the listed 'cry, dance, sing, build, create', which hints at a range of creative responses. Such analysis explored the use of imperatives which give the poem a sense of urgency.

Good essays noted the use of absolutes like 'everything' to suggest hyperbolic effort, and there was good discussion of the short lines which increased the impression of urgent action and a 'call to arms'. There was thoughtful analysis of the juxtapositions in the final stanza, which turn the ugliness and pain of much the poem into 'something beautiful' in a redemptive climax.

Weaker responses did not explore any sense of poetic form and structure, and noted images as either good or bad, without exploring how the poet used techniques to create those effects.

WORLD LITERATURE

Paper 0408/31

Set Text

Key messages

Successful responses:

- Show a detailed knowledge of texts.
- Address the question explicitly.
- Support their views with relevant textual reference.
- Explore closely the ways in which writers achieve their effects.
- Use much direct quotation in **Section B** answers to explore the detail of the writing.

Less successful responses:

- Have an insecure or limited knowledge of texts.
- Narrate or describe aspects of texts rather than answer the question.
- Make assertions which are not substantiated.
- Merely log or explain writers' techniques.
- Have an insufficient range of quotations to support views and explore aspects of the writing in **Section B** answers.

General comments

There was much evidence that candidates had enjoyed the texts they had studied. The most popular this session were *In the Sea there are Crocodiles* and *The Cherry Orchard*, both new this year. There was also a significant number of responses to the poetry and *Fever Dream*. Anowa was less popular and there were very few responses to the short stories. In **Section B**, fewer candidates who had done poetry for **Question 5** chose **Question 11**, which may be because they find it more challenging without the text printed on the paper. These candidates usually opted for **Question 9** (*In the Sea there are Crocodiles*) and **Question 10** (*The Cherry Orchard*) instead. Centres must remind candidates to put the question number in the margin, rather than simply labelling their responses A and B as this causes problems for Examiners as it is not always clear as to which question the candidate is answering. This is especially the case where they use a passage to respond to **Section B**, even when this is not permitted.

Most candidates divided their time well across their two answers for this paper. Some of the least successful **Section B** answers restricted their range of reference to the extract printed with **Section A** questions, even where the **Section B** question instructed candidates **not** to do so, such as **Question 7** on fear and **Question 9** on Enaiat's search for a better life. A few candidates used the extract for **Question 8**, writing about Anowa and Badua or Osam and Badua instead of Anowa and Kofi. **Question 8** does not bar candidates from using the extract in **Section A** because it is irrelevant. Candidates need to be familiar with the layout and rubric of the paper before they sit the examination.

The strongest answers showed an impressive knowledge of the text, with candidates skilfully incorporating concise quotations to support their ideas. For **Section A** questions, the most successful responses explored the detail of the extracts with considerable sensitivity, using much well-selected reference. For **Section B** questions, the most successful candidates were able to recall from the whole text an extensive range of quotation which they deployed effectively in their response to the question. In less successful responses across both sections of the paper, an absence of direct textual support led to writing that was overly dependent on assertion and explanation. The weakest responses to **Section A** questions tracked the content of the extract without selecting relevant material with which to address the question.

The most successful responses tailored their material to the key words in the question from start to finish: these answers engaged directly with those words in questions designed to elicit personal responses to the writing, adjectives such as 'striking', 'revealing' 'memorable' and 'vivid' and adverbs such as 'memorably' 'vividly and 'powerfully.' There were, however, some responses that made only a limited attempt to address these key words. A significant number of candidates are still using a learned opening paragraph for **Section A** which was repeated in **Section B**, explaining the context or providing an overview of the plot and writer's intentions. Where it is irrelevant to the question, it takes time that could be used for developing ideas that are. Centres are recommended to work with their candidates on developing a thesis statement in their opening paragraph, that provides an overview of their personal response. Candidates should be told that detailed knowledge on its own cannot achieve the highest reward; they should tailor relevant material from their knowledge to address the specific demands of the question set.

Some candidates lacked analytical focus and spent a lot of time on personal reflection instead of textual analysis, diverting attention from the demands of the question as a result. This was compounded at times by a reliance on pre-learned essays which tended to undermine relevance and coherence. In less successful answers, the use of literary terminology was frequently superficial. Candidates often mentioned devices such as alliteration, assonance, or rhyme without explaining their effects within the context of the text. However, stronger responses were more precise and evaluative, using key adverbs from the question itself—such as 'strikingly,' 'powerfully,' or 'vividly'—to shape their responses effectively. These candidates demonstrated a clear understanding of authorial craft, often analysing the passage as a constructed piece of writing rather than merely retelling events.

Lower-level responses tended to explain the events in the extract in their own words without close reference to the language used or to the specific question. Higher level responses demonstrated an in-depth knowledge of the text, recognising the circumstances surrounding specific extract which placed it into context and were able to analyse specifics of the text in detail and with sensitivity, linking their analysis to the key specifics of the question.

Centres should continue to support candidates in analysing literary techniques such as alliteration, assonance, caesura and rhyme, without overgeneralising. The term 'auditory imagery' was more evident this year. Some candidates applied it to whole phrases where there seems to be little phonology. More precise terms such as consonance, assonance or onomatopoeia would provide more focused analysis. There were many claims made for the effects of phonological patterning which were not explicitly supported by the evidence cited. 'Semantic field' is often used, but unhelpful without close exploration of specific examples of the language.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

Most candidates focused on the significance of the dead bird and the implication of David sucking his fingers after putting his hand in the stream, recognising how these events foreshadow subsequent events both in the passage and later in the book. Many focused on the use of the rhetorical question 'What for?' and most recognised the significance of the description of the sick horse as foreshadowing what is likely to happen to David. The simile 'like a locomotive' to describe the horse's heartbeat was frequently commented on as indicative of the effect of the poison, leading to speculation regarding what the poison is likely do to a small child if a strong healthy horse is this badly affected. Some questioned Carla's decision not to seek medical help or discuss what has happened with Omar and criticised Carla's reasoning. Others saw her inaction as indicative of the lack of facilities and concern shown for people in rural Argentina. Carla's desperation was recognised in the simile 'pray like a crazy woman' with many recognising this as indicative of Carla's building sense of desperation which finally pushes her towards the decision to take him to the green house. The references to time 'a few hours, or maybe minutes' was seen as building tension and a sense of urgency. Many also recognised the significance of the change in narrator towards the end of the passage and how this brings the reader's attention back to Amanda's concerns for Nina and the 'rescue distance.' The final rhetorical question was also seen as particularly significant in explaining Carla's sense of guilt regarding her role in what has happened to David.

Stronger answers successfully contextualised the contamination incident and recognised its significance in terms of plot and character development within the broader themes of environmental issues and maternal bonds and responsibilities. They further explored Carla's moral and emotional complexity, drawing on

specific language choices such as 'monstrosity' and 'whatever the cost.' Some explored and questioned the reasons for Carla's decision not to seek medical help or tell Omar what has happened. Responses often delved into the effect of the disturbing imagery of the horse's transformation and analysed how it heightened the emotional tension as it becomes clear that David has also been contaminated.

The best answers remained focused on the key words of the question throughout, highlighting why and how the extract is striking although some weaker answers went through the appearance of focusing on the question by topping and tailing their paragraphs with a reference to the steer without fully engaging with it otherwise.

In contrast, weaker answers tended to summarise the narrative without adequate analysis, and some treated the extract as an unseen passage. These responses sometimes misidentified characters or failed to understand perspectives, and few engaged with the symbolic and sometimes ironic dimensions to Schweblin's writing. In addition, some weaker answers drifted away from the steer of the question in order to discuss contextual details regarding Argentina's policy of overusing pesticides at the expense of focusing on the extract. Very few candidates addressed the more visceral language, including the mild swearing—which could have reinforced the horror and intensity of the scene.

Question 2

Most candidates were able to recognise the context of the extract both in terms of where it appears in the play and what is happening amongst the characters at this point. Most also recognised the character traits of Badua and Osam as the angry and overbearing mother and supposedly more understanding father while also recognising that they are products of their cultural and historical background.

Most recognised Badua's concern at Anowa's not being married 'six years after puberty' with many comparing this with a modern perspective which would see this as still very young. In addition, most explored the way in which Anowa, even in her absence, is a cause of concern for her parents as she defies cultural norms by refusing to marry. Stronger candidates however, also recognised the approaching irony which occurs when Anowa announces her choice of husband only to have Badua disapprove. Further irony could be seen in Badua's desire to see Anowa married when her own marriage seems far from happy and Badua's insistence on following cultural norms and expectations while flying in the face of traditional views on how a wife behaves herself by criticising and arguing with her husband.

Many focused on Badua's refusal to allow Anowa to become a priestess with some focusing on the fact that Anowa is their only child with much focus directed towards her reasoning that 'they are not people.'

The stage directions were also a source of much consideration with Osam's sitting still compared with Badua's pacing reflecting their differing attitudes while Badua's holding of the ladle and stirring the pot being indicative of her traditional role as a Ghanaian woman in the 19th century.

The best responses recognised the extract as drama and considered the use of dramatic techniques. They further analysed familial relationships, especially between Badua and Osam, within the Ghanaian cultural context. The stronger candidates were sensitive to the idea that while Badua may appear overbearing while Osam seems more reasonable, this can be interpreted as Badua attempting to do what is best for her daughter in the eyes of 19th century Ghanaian culture while her husband abdicates all responsibility.

Weaker responses, however, tended to regard the characters and events as if they were real and failed to engage with the dramatic form, often focusing on surface-level conflict without considering why the moment was dramatically revealing. These answers tended to neglect the author's use of stagecraft and social commentary.

Question 3

This extract was by far the most popular among candidates, who generally demonstrated a strong understanding of both its context and content. Many responses were of high quality, revealing thoughtful engagement with the text and perceptive analysis of its emotional and narrative elements.

Most candidates successfully identified the vivid sensory imagery used to convey Enaiat's close relationship with his mother. References to touch, such as 'the cotton cover between my fingers,' and smell, as in 'the reassuring smell of her skin,' were commonly recognised as evoking a sense of warmth, security, and maternal comfort. These physical sensations were seen to underscore Enaiat's deep emotional attachment and reliance on his mother in an unfamiliar and threatening environment.

Candidates also explored the rising anxiety Enaiat experiences when he realises his mother has left. Many focused on the repetition of the phrase 'She was not' and the listing of possible places she might be, effectively identifying how this anaphora mirrors Enaiat's growing panic and sense of abandonment. His confusion and distress were seen as especially poignant, capturing the vulnerability of a child suddenly left alone.

There was also insightful analysis of the contrast between Enaiat's memories of Ghazni and his current surroundings in Quetta. This juxtaposition was understood to highlight his innocence and lack of worldly experience. Candidates frequently commented on the use of sentence structure, noting how short, abrupt phrases like 'No answer' build tension and reflect Enaiat's inner turmoil.

The depiction of the samavat as 'a warehouse for bodies and souls' prompted thoughtful responses. Many recognised this metaphor as a critique of how illegal immigrants are often dehumanised and treated as commodities. The owner's statement that 'nobody went in or out without him noticing' was interpreted as reinforcing the oppressive atmosphere, likening the samavat more to a prison than a hotel.

Enaiat's memory of hiding under his mother's burqa was another moment that candidates explored well. Most saw it as an act of protection against the threat of border guards, while stronger candidates recognised a dual layer of meaning: the mother's effort to shield her son from both physical danger and the emotional trauma of their reality. Some also made sophisticated links between this scene and Enaiat's earlier memories of swimming, noting how the skill becomes vital later in his journey.

Stronger responses showed empathy and analytical depth, clearly articulating the emotional complexity of Enaiat's abandonment and the symbolic significance of his surroundings. In contrast, weaker responses tended to rely heavily on summary, lacked precision in distinguishing past from present, and often missed key symbolic or emotional details due to limited vocabulary or superficial reading.

Question 4

Some candidates found this extract challenging as it focused on more minor characters rather than the more central figures of Ranevsky or Lopakhin. Those who performed well were able to combine close character analysis with a broader understanding of the socio-political changes reflected in the play—particularly the decline of the Russian aristocracy and Chekhov's use of tragicomedy.

Many candidates centred their analysis on Gayev and his attempts to comfort Varya by insisting that the sale of the cherry orchard will not occur. His childlike behaviour—manifested in his obsession with billiards and sweets—was widely recognised as symbolic of his ineffectiveness and detachment from reality. The line 'I'll stake my life' was often interpreted ironically, with candidates linking it to the larger theme of aristocratic denial and decay. Gayev's misplaced confidence in a clearly doomed plan was seen to underline how the old ruling classes are out of touch with their changing world.

Another commonly discussed moment was Gayev's comment, 'You have to know your peasants, of course.' Many responses identified this line as indicative of the aristocracy's lingering condescension and sense of superiority. Stronger candidates pointed out the irony of Gayev's elitist attitude, especially given that he had just spoken of needing to borrow money from both the bank and Lopakhin—himself a former peasant. The best candidates recognised that this juxtaposition effectively highlights the shifting social order and the aristocracy's growing dependence on the very class they once looked down upon.

A smaller number of candidates explored the reactions of Anya and Varya to Gayev's reassurances. Anya's comic declaration that Gayev is 'so sensible' was often interpreted as further evidence of the aristocracy's delusional optimism and refusal to confront uncomfortable truths. Fewer, though more astute, responses analysed the role of Firs, the elderly servant, and his dynamic with Gayev. His attempts to send Gayev to bed reinforce the latter's childish persona, while Firs himself represents the fading past. His remark that Gayev is 'past praying for' was seen not only as a criticism of Gayev's current behaviour but also as a symbolic foreshadowing of his ultimate failure to save the cherry orchard.

In contrast, weaker responses tended to summarise the dialogue without much analysis. While some did mention the broader theme of the aristocracy's decline, many failed to explore how Chekhov's characterisation, tone, and dramatic technique serve as critiques of a society in transition. These responses often lacked the depth needed to fully engage with the play's thematic and symbolic richness.

Question 5

Although this poem was one of the less popular question choices in the exam, it was generally well received by those who attempted it. Almost all candidates were able to engage with the content in a meaningful way, and even weaker responses showed some exploration of the poet's use of language and tone. The overall narrative of the poem was found to be accessible, and most candidates were able to demonstrate a basic understanding of its key themes.

The majority of responses focused successfully on the steer of the question, identifying ways in which the poem evokes sympathy for the parrot. Many highlighted its physical condition, noting the description of it as 'old, sick and green,' as well as the parrot's confinement and forced removal from its natural habitat. These elements were generally understood as evoking a sense of cruelty and loss, helping readers to empathise with the bird's suffering.

The poem's opening line received particular attention. Some candidates commented on the contrast or juxtaposition between the 'sick green' of the parrot and the vibrant 'jungle green' associated with its former home. This contrast was often interpreted as symbolic of the difference between freedom and captivity. The phrase 'malevolent rage' was also frequently discussed, though some candidates struggled with the word 'malevolent,' leading to uncertainty about whether the parrot's anger was directed outwardly or was a reflection of its internal torment.

A number of candidates picked up on the poem's use of colour imagery, with stronger responses noting a semantic field of colours throughout. For example, comparisons were drawn between the two uses of green and the reference to 'yellow skies,' which some interpreted as representing urban pollution rather than a cheerful image. This interpretation added a layer of socio-environmental commentary to the poem's depiction of the parrot's suffering.

More advanced responses identified moments of beauty in the urban environment—such as the 'shining' wet streets—but argued that this paled in comparison to the rich, natural beauty of the parrot's lost home. The emotional power of the poem's final lines, in which the parrot is described as 'waiting for death' and praying it 'would not be long,' was recognised by nearly all candidates and often linked back to the earlier mention of 'despair.'

Stronger candidates explored how words like 'dingy' contrasted with 'tropic' helping to evoke sympathy and a sense of displacement. Some went further to interpret the parrot as a metaphor for human experiences of exile or forced migration, recognising in the poem a potentially wider socio-political resonance.

While stronger responses considered how the irregular free verse and half-rhyme reflected the parrot's discomfort and loss of freedom, weaker answers often lacked detailed analysis of structure and tended to focus simplistically on the idea that the parrot was 'sad,' missing opportunities for deeper interpretation.

Question 6

There were very few responses to this question and the feedback is limited in scope. While most candidates demonstrated a basic understanding of plot events, very few addressed the dramatic or literary impact of the endings. The story's emotional or thematic resolution was either ignored or treated superficially, and very few candidates analysed the language, tone, or structural elements that made the conclusion impactful.

Successful responses recognised the emphasis on communication and the moment of epiphany when Ian realises that Isobel is not having an affair. They also recognised that his painful attempts to speak represent the return of communication and love within their marriage. These candidates made close reference to the text and showed clear understanding.

Section B

Question 7

All candidates were able to identify some ways in which Schweblin makes *Fever Dream* a disturbing and frightening novel. Many referred to the relationship between Amanda and David, as she is dying in a clinic from the poisoned water in extreme agony. Some wrote about the construction of dialogue and the way she is being 'interrogated' by an unreliable narrator, David, supposedly a child but with the language and manners of a much older person. The strongest responses analysed the build-up of fear with David, a relentless interrogator, pushing Amanda on to the exact moment of contamination and reminding her

menacingly that time is running out. One candidate described David as showing 'an inhuman lack of empathy' to Amanda as he repeats, 'That is not important' as she deals with her impending death and fears for Nina. Many candidates also wrote about the changes in Carla and David's relationship, because of the transmigration, exploring the language she uses about him, for example a 'monster' and how she found him burying ducks. A few linked this to Omar's perceived need to carry a knife when looking for his young son and locking a child up at night.

Amanda and Nina's relationship was often explored through the recurring motif of the 'rescue distance' and rope (like an umbilical cord) with the most frightening knowledge that 'bad things were always going to happen' and not even an over-protective mother like Amanda could prevent that. High level responses were able to show real understanding of the ominous impact of it 'finally going slack like a lit fuse' at the end of the novel.

Many candidates referred to the fear of agricultural pollution and the secrecy of the town where men wear protective gloves when working with the fertilisers. They picked up on the insidious signs of environmental contamination in references to dew, to miscarriage and to birth defects that haunt the novel. The strongest responses confidently linked this to the unnerving encounter with the deformed girl in town, recognising too that frightening seeds were sown with Carla's revealing 'People come down with things all the time, and even if they survive, they end up changed.' The mystery surrounding the woman in the green room was occasionally mentioned with her being likened to a witch in a folk or dark fairy story.

Less successful responses referred to pre-learned ideas or events in the novel, explaining them with only limited reference to the question. They often lacked direct quotations on which to base analysis of the writing. While stronger responses remarked on the disjointed and non-linear narrative as a way of creating fear, others stated that it was frightening because it caused confusion.

Question 8

Candidates showed understanding of the initial loving relationship between Anowa and Kofi as they leave Yebi in defiance of Badua and how this slowly deteriorates as Kofi becomes wealthier. Many referred to the lack of children as contributing to the tensions and the way Anowa's encouragement to take another wife exacerbated his negative self-esteem. Their argument over purchasing slaves and Anowa's desire to work was seen as a pivotal in the breakdown of their relationship. Some candidates explored how Aidoo uses language and stage directions to show how the breakdown in their relationship finally results in their deaths.

The strongest responses explored the growing tensions from their first scene together, whilst balancing these against their mutual affection and playfulness shown there. Badua's predictions were often referred to, with her insistence that the relationship would not work through criticisms of Kofi. While most were critical of Kofi and championed Anowa's independent spirit, some felt she only had herself to blame as she rushed into the relationship with someone she did not really know. Most candidates wrote about the context with traditional patriarchal values and could link these to Anowa's rejection of these in embracing the life on the road early on which Kofi is keen to abandon. Answers tended to fall into two parts with the early conversations written about more confidently and fully whilst later scenes were often much thinner.

Less successful responses tended to narrate some of the key moments in the play between Anowa and Kofi or focus more on Badua's attitude to their relationship. They showed uncertainty about the tragic outcome and wrote about the expectations of women, but with limited reference to the text.

Question 9

The most successful worked explored Enaiat's challenges from being abandoned by his mother in Pakistan to working his way through the different countries to reach Italy. They identified his determination and resilience as he is forced to grow up quickly, and many referred to the horrors of his ill treatment at the hands of employers, police etc. with deportations and forced labour in some brutal working conditions. While less successful responses simply described these conditions, more successful ones showed understanding of how his experiences made him strive for a safe place to live where he could be happy and resume his education.

Many candidates gave a personal response to his 27 days' mountain hike and taking the boots from the dead refugee was understood as a moment where breaking his mother's rule about not stealing was put into perspective. Many remained incredulous that a child/children could have experienced such traumas in search of a safe place, and it most definitely impacted on some candidates' thoughts about school and education, the authorities and, the treatment of people who go through such hardships in search of a better

life and place to live. In addition to the horrors of the truck journey, some focused on the nosebleed that Enaiat suffers in the later stages of the novel, seeing the blood as connoting Enaiat's pain and struggles to reach safety. Another candidate pointed out the resilience of Enaiat who is slapped across the face by a man while eating noodles in Pakistan and later called a 'rat' but retains the determination to find safety. Other candidates commented on the metaphorical 'need to breathe, that Enaiat remarks upon as a reason for leaving.

Candidates felt the novel gave them a powerful insight into a refugee's life. They noted that he had a happy home but did not always consider why he left. Those who did referred to Enaiat's position as a Hazaran persecuted by the Taliban. Here the importance of school/education featured in several responses with the bleak image 'without school, life is like ashes' which some candidates explored. Some candidates referred to his time at the construction site in Iran where 'The site was not only our home. The site was our world. The site was our solar system'. However, only higher-level candidates analysed the effects of the language here. The old lady's kindness featured in many answers with a few going on to mention the asylum hearing. The few candidates who explored the reconciliation saw how he finally had the safe place his mother had sought for him.

Less successful responses narrated the events in his journey but struggled to provide textual evidence or focus on what motivates Enaiat.

Question 10

Many candidates saw Mrs Ranevsky as a member of a dying breed of penniless aristocrats who found it difficult to live within their means once their wealth and estate was depleted. There was sympathy due to her husband's and son's death but less so for her lovers and spending of money she did not have. Her nostalgia for her past and the cherry orchard was a feature of most answers. Higher level responses explored how the ghostly image of her mother suggested her unstable, vulnerable emotional state though a few thought she'd gone mad and was hallucinating as she could see her mother in the orchard. As she was supposedly dressed in white, some candidates explored symbolism of white and purity, contrasting this with the nature of Mrs Ranevsky's past life in Paris.

Most responses noted that Mrs Ranevsky was locked in the past and unable to move forward. They remarked on her over- sentimentality and vulnerability too. They noted her instability and spontaneity in running away from tragedy at home. Many candidates wrote about the mood of nostalgia and longing for the past in connection with her return to the family estate, the nursery, and the cherry orchard. Stronger responses explored this emotional attachment, taking note of the stage directions, how she 'laughs happily' declaring 'Nothing's changed' recognising the irony in the context of how is representative of the old aristocracy, losing power in the face of the rise of new capitalism represented by Lopakhin. Less successful responses bolted on the context at the end or beginning of their response. Candidates often referred to how her prolific spending has continued, as she fails to face reality, supporting this with Anya's description of her mother's tipping in restaurants. Mrs Ranevsky's confession comparing her spending of money to flowing water is a simile that was analysed in varying degrees of sensitivity.

Less successful responses provided simple explanations of Mrs Ranevsky's actions and had difficulty in supporting ideas with textual reference.

Question 11

Most responses focused on the violent effects of the Storm-Wind on nature and people and this was contrasted with the later safety of the house. They focused on verbs which suggest the strength of the wind and sensitively explored the personification of the wind as something that threatens the 'identity and respect' of its victims by threatening to blow away a hat and disorder hair. The response saw the 'soothing and relaxing' atmosphere created in the final stanza by the pairing of 'sigh' and 'nigh'.

The focus on the writing, with the key word 'vividly' allowed all candidates to consider to some degree the effect of the storm on humanity as well as on nature. Higher level response candidates explored individual words or phrases ('writhes...quivering...') and explore their power and impact. Less successful responses were hampered by including few quotations and these tended to refer simply to the effect on people, the man 'holding his hat' and the girl whose hair style is spoilt suggesting the wind is very strong.

Question 12

There were few responses to this question and feedback is therefore limited. Most successful responses drew comparisons with the cyclical structure of the narrator's thoughts at the beginning as he looked in the mirror, asserting 'I have not changed much over the years' to his passing the window of Woolworths near the end where he sees 'clearly that age has come to me at last'. Candidates recognised the narrator's fears of breaking from his routine in his question 'What would happen if I stopped?' Most candidates drew comparisons between the younger jogger/boxer and the narrator noting 'compared to his stony features, I am all crystal' with the narrator's relative frailty/fragility being suggested by this metaphor.

Less successful responses struggled to recall relevant quotations and explained some of the main events in the story, with simple comments on the narrator's feelings.

WORLD LITERATURE

Paper 0408/32

Set Text

Key messages

Successful responses:

- Show a detailed knowledge of texts.
- Address the question explicitly.
- Support their views with relevant textual reference.
- Explore closely the ways in which writers achieve their effects.
- Use much direct quotation in **Section B** answers to explore the detail of the writing.

Less successful responses:

- Have an insecure or limited knowledge of texts.
- Narrate or describe aspects of texts rather than answer the question.
- Make assertions which are not substantiated.
- Merely log or explain writers' techniques.
- Have an insufficient range of quotations to support views and explore aspects of the writing in **Section B** answers.

General comments

Candidates clearly enjoyed the texts they had studied, with poetry proving the most popular, followed closely by the new texts *In the Sea There Are Crocodiles* and *The Cherry Orchard*. *Fever Dream* and *Anowa* also attracted a good number of responses. In contrast, there were very few responses to the short stories.

Most candidates managed their time effectively across both responses, though a minority struggled with their second answer due to poor timing, or spent too long crossing out and rewriting paragraphs. Some wasted time by answering more than one **Section A** question. Even if they later completed a **Section B** response, this impacted on the quality of their responses and demonstrates that planning is essential.

A recurring issue was incorrect question numbering, with some candidates marking only A or B in the margin. Additionally, a small but significant number of candidates did not follow the rubric, by using quotations from **Section A** texts in **Section B** responses even when they were directly instructed not to do so. A few wrote about Amanda and David in **Question 7**, instead of Carla and David, and used references from **Question 1**. Some used the **Question 3** extract as one of the moments in the novel which shows Enaiat's search for a better life in **Question 9**. **Question 10** was sometimes misunderstood as referring to the title of the play or as a focus on its key themes rather than the cherry orchard itself. The extract from **Question 4** was used by some candidates for this purpose as well as those who correctly wrote about the orchard. Centres must tell their candidates that they are not credited for any section of a **Section B** response which uses the extract from **Section A** if they are explicitly instructed not to do so and where it is irrelevant.

Successful responses demonstrated sensitive engagement with the extract, well-chosen textual references, and a sound grasp of context and style. These answers used key steer words — like 'powerfully' or 'vividly' — integrally in their analysis. Less successful responses often relied on narrative summary, vague quotation, or personal opinion, with minimal connection to the question or steer words.

Introductions and conclusions varied in quality. The best were concise and relevant, while weaker ones repeated earlier points or included unnecessary commentary, especially in overly long conclusions. A significant number of candidates are still using a learned opening paragraph for **Section A** which was repeated in **Section B**, explaining the context or providing an overview of the plot and writer's intentions.

Where it is irrelevant to the question, it takes time that could be used for developing ideas that are focused. Centres are recommended to work with their candidates on developing a thesis statement in their opening paragraph, that provides an overview of their personal response. Candidates should be told that detailed knowledge on its own cannot achieve the highest reward; they should tailor relevant material from their knowledge to address the specific demands of the question set.

Some candidates referenced line numbers without quoting directly, weakening their analysis. Others demonstrated only a basic understanding of the text, with limited exploration of language, structure, and form. A lack of direct quotation often hindered meaningful commentary on the writer's craft. Some candidates appear to have been encouraged to link themes to their personal lives. This approach often distracted from the question and resulted in unfocused responses.

Centres should continue to support candidates in analysing literary techniques such as alliteration, assonance, caesura and rhyme, without overgeneralising. The term 'auditory imagery' was more evident this year. Some candidates applied it to whole phrases where there seems to be little phonology. More precise terms such as consonance, assonance or onomatopoeia would provide more focused analysis. There were many claims made for the effects of phonological patterning which were not explicitly supported by the evidence cited. 'Semantic field' is often used, but unhelpful without close exploration of specific examples of the language.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

Many candidates engaged thoughtfully with the extract from *Fever Dream*, showing a strong grasp of its dramatic qualities and the significance of Amanda's situation. Most understood the symbolism of the 'rescue distance,' represented by a tightening rope, and were able to explore Amanda's psychological and physical vulnerability as she lies in hospital, suffering the disorienting effects of contamination. Many recognised that Carla had taken Nina to the 'green house' without Amanda's consent, drawing disturbing parallels with what happened to Carla's son, David. This prompted analysis of Amanda's rising maternal anxiety and her loss of control, expressed through vivid imagery and symbolism.

Candidates frequently commented on Schweblin's powerful descriptions, such as 'hundreds of needles of pain radiate from (her) throat,' interpreting this as a reflection of Amanda's psychological trauma manifesting physically. Some insightful responses explored the symbolic weight of Amanda's fever, linking it to wider environmental concerns, including the use of pesticides and the ecology. Some high level responses also identified gothic elements within the extract—particularly themes of entrapment, helplessness, and blurred boundaries between reality and hallucination—and explained how these contributed to the unsettling atmosphere.

Most candidates showed a sound understanding of the narrative's context, characters, and structure. They were able to place the scene accurately within the novel and reflect on Amanda's illness and its impact on her perception, especially during her disjointed exchanges with Carla and David. Several responses analysed the fragmented narrative style, recognising how it mirrors Amanda's mental disintegration. Some also acknowledged Amanda's dawning realisation that Carla is not seeking consent for the transmigration but forgiveness—marking a shift from confusion to dread.

However, a small number of candidates misunderstood key plot points, suggesting, for example, that Carla was trying to convince Amanda to undergo the transmigration. Others seemed to approach the passage as unseen, likely having overlooked the text they had studied. These responses often quoted phrases like 'we have to do it fast' or 'needles of pain' without offering meaningful analysis or linking them to the wider narrative.

The strongest answers included insightful analysis of both language and structure, showing clear awareness of the text as a carefully crafted work. These responses explored symbolism, narrative fragmentation, and contrasts between characters—particularly Amanda and Carla—as deliberate techniques used by Schweblin to explore maternal fear, powerlessness, and environmental destruction.

Less successful responses tended to treat the characters as real people rather than literary constructs, offering plot summary instead of analysis. These responses often lacked interpretive depth, failed to connect

dramatic elements to narrative purpose, and sometimes demonstrated fundamental misunderstandings of the text.

Question 2

Many candidates responded well to the *Anowa* extract, showing a clear understanding of the scene's dramatic qualities and the nuanced relationship between Anowa and Kofi Ako. They often made effective use of the stage directions, recognising the stormy weather as pathetic fallacy. The dark, thunderous setting was widely interpreted as foreshadowing future conflict, contrasting with the couple's initial warmth and affection. Many noted this early affection as ironic, given the tragic collapse of their relationship later in the play.

Most candidates successfully contextualised the scene as the audience's introduction to Anowa and Kofi as a newly married couple. They recognised the physical demands of their work and the playful, affectionate tone of their exchanges. Kofi Ako's worry when Anowa fails to reply was often seen as evidence of his concern, though stronger responses questioned whether this masked deeper insecurities, such as fears linked to masculinity or legacy, later revealed through his infertility.

Gender dynamics were a central focus, with many observing Anowa's rejection of traditional female roles—insisting on working and giving her food to Kofi. His unhesitating acceptance was noted by several as a subtle sign of imbalance. More analytical responses explored Kofi's desire for control, using lines like 'do you compare yourself to me?' to highlight early signs of his need to assert dominance. Many also commented on Aidoo's contrasting depictions of the characters: Kofi as traditionally masculine –'great,' 'strong,' 'huge' – and Anowa as vulnerable, described as a 'chick in a puddle.'

Stronger responses explored how the couple's light-hearted teasing masks deeper tensions. These responses analysed foreshadowing, symbolism, and language to comment on gender roles, societal expectations, and individual agency. Some questioned the nature of Kofi's affection—whether it was rooted in love, dependence, or practical need—and considered how Aidoo critiques traditional values through their dynamic. High level responses included perceptive analysis of language, structure, and stagecraft. Candidates recognised how Aidoo uses pathetic fallacy, dialogue, and physical gesture to add emotional and thematic depth. They saw the extract as deliberately constructed to signal later conflict and reinforce the play's wider critique of gender norms.

Less successful responses tended to describe rather than analyse. Some misread key details, such as Kofi's infertility, or overlooked irony and foreshadowing. These responses often lacked engagement with the playwright's intent, instead treating characters as real people, and failed to connect the extract to broader themes.

Question 3

Most candidates demonstrated a strong understanding of the extract's context, recognising it as a pivotal moment. The scene's tension was widely acknowledged, with candidates identifying the boys' youth, inexperience, and the life-threatening nature of their journey.

Many candidates responded thoughtfully to the text's structural features. The absence of speech marks, abrupt line breaks, and the fast-paced dialogue were widely noted as tools used to mirror the boys' confusion and fear. The use of rhetorical questions and short, clipped exchanges was frequently seen as reflecting the chaos and panic of the moment. Words like 'dived' and phrases such as 'groping' and 'my arms stiff' were often highlighted as indicators of physical fear and danger, emphasising Enaiat and the boys' vulnerability.

A common observation was the boys' misunderstanding of the 'red and green' lights, which many used to highlight their naivety and lack of experience. While some read too much into the colour symbolism, others correctly identified the boys' misinterpretation as a symptom of their inexperience. The crocodiles metaphor – 'they eat your feet' – was widely explored, with stronger candidates understanding it as both a childlike expression of fear and a symbolic representation of the unseen dangers migrants face.

Candidates often commented on Enaiat's emerging leadership role, noting that despite being only marginally older and more experienced, he is burdened with responsibility. His surprise at the rocks in the sea and admission that he can only swim 'a little' further reinforced the danger of their situation. Several candidates also recognised the emotional weight of the contrast between the boys' desperation and the normalcy of people dining in nearby homes, drawing attention to the disparity between refugee and civilian life.

The strongest responses moved beyond character-based analysis to consider Geda's broader commentary on the refugee experience. These candidates explored how the extract critiques the dehumanising treatment of migrants by authorities and reflects the universal struggles of displacement, fear, and survival. They analysed how language and structure work to elicit empathy and present Enaiat not only as a protagonist but as a symbol of resilience and hope.

Less successful response tended to focus narrowly on the dialogue and did not consider the full extract. Some lacked context, failing to explain why the boys were tense or misinterpreting key moments. Others summarised events or offered generic language analysis without connecting techniques to broader meaning or authorial intent.

Question 4

Most candidates successfully contextualised the extract, identifying Lopakhin's mounting frustration as he proposes a practical solution to Mrs Ranevsky's financial crisis. His idea—to lease the cherry orchard for summer cottage developments—was widely understood, and many noted the dramatic tension in Mrs Ranevsky's dismissive response, calling it 'frightfully vulgar.' This phrase was often explored as a reflection of her romanticised attachment to the aristocratic past, her resistance to change and her misplaced sense of superiority.

There was broad recognition of the situational irony: Lopakhin, once a serf, now holds the power to save the family, yet his solution is rejected by those clinging to obsolete values. Many candidates explored the reversal of roles, commenting on the symbolic significance of a peasant offering a viable plan while the aristocracy refuses to adapt.

Mrs Ranevsky's character was frequently analysed through her emotive monologue recounting personal losses – the deaths of her husband and son, betrayal by a lover, and a suicide attempt. Most recognised the pathos in her speech but also her emotional inconsistency: she dries her eyes and, moments later, wants to hold a party. Her confession that she 'spends money like water' was often cited as a sign of her detachment from reality. Most recognised her character as representative of the attitude of the aristocracy in Russia whose inability to adapt and accept change was leading to their downfall in comparison to the emerging, more pragmatic middle class represented by Lopakhin.

Stronger responses examined Chekhov's characterisation and dramatic techniques in detail. These candidates considered the tension between sympathy and frustration evoked by Mrs Ranevsky's escapism. Some explored her enduring class prejudice, as shown in her remark, 'You people should not go and see plays,' which reflects her condescension toward Lopakhin despite needing his help. A strong grasp of the play as performance also saw it as Chekov breaking the fourth wall to challenge the audience themselves. They further examined the play's socio-political context, interpreting the orchard's impending destruction as symbolic of the fall of the aristocracy and the rise of the middle class.

Less successful responses tended to summarise the plot or focused too narrowly on character without analysing dramatic techniques. Some misunderstood key details—such as claiming Lopakhin suggests selling the orchard—or failed to recognise the scene's symbolic and historical significance. Others treated the characters as real people rather than literary constructs.

Question 5

Candidates clearly enjoyed the poem and responded well to the prompt, offering detailed analysis of its language and structure. Most showed a sound understanding of the poem's central concerns—particularly the physical and elusive nature of eels and the difficulty of locating them—which many linked effectively to broader thematic ideas. Interpretations of the term 'mudfish' varied. Some identified it as another name for eels; others saw it as a different fish, occasionally mistaken for eels by the speaker. Both readings were accepted as highlighting the speaker's confusion and frustration.

Most candidates adopted a line-by-line approach, carefully analysing how Oswald conveys the experience of eel-hunting. The repetition and isolated placement of the word 'gone' were frequently discussed, often interpreted as symbolising the sudden disappearance of the eels and reinforcing their elusive nature. The lack of punctuation and use of enjambment were widely linked to the flow of water and the slipperiness of the eels themselves.

Oswald's use of invented or unusual words such as 'underlurkers' and 'waterwicks' was often noted, with candidates exploring how these choices enhanced the mystery of the eels. Many also engaged with the

second-person perspective, recognising how it draws the reader into the speaker's quest. Imagery such as the personification in 'a smirk of ripples' was read as suggesting the eels' mocking or evasive nature.

Stronger responses offered insightful interpretations of key metaphors. 'Plumbing system' and 'sea veins' were explored for their suggestion of hidden complexity and ecological interconnectedness. Some noted the shift in the final lines from 'them' to 'her,' interpreting it as a personalisation of the eel and suggesting a more intimate or symbolic relationship.

High-level responses also examined the poem's lunar imagery, focusing on terms such as 'unmoon' and 'cousins of the moon' to suggest the eels' connection to unseen natural cycles. The invented word 'penamula' was read as reinforcing their ancient, unknowable presence. These candidates often explored the poem's philosophical implications, suggesting it reflects humanity's fascination with the unknown and the limits of human understanding.

The strongest answers recognised the poem's rich ambiguity and tone of mystery. They explored Oswald's use of language, structure, and form with precision, and considered the symbolic significance of the eels as representing the unconscious, nature's secrets, or the search for knowledge. These responses often linked the pursuit of eels to a broader meditation on discovery, imagination, and perception.

Less successful responses tended to summarise the poem or listed techniques without exploring their effects. Some focused too narrowly on one idea or misread key metaphors, missing the poem's layered complexity and philosophical depth.

Question 6

There were very few responses to this question, making feedback limited in scope. Most candidates successfully contextualised the extract, recognising it as a reflective moment during the narrator's walk to the jetty with her parents. Commonly identified themes included nostalgia, coming of age, and the inevitability of change. Many responses explored the narrator's emotional connection to her surroundings, with sensory imagery—such as 'passed by sounds and smells that were so familiar'—highlighting a deep sense of longing. Symbolism, including the past 'slipping between boards,' was interpreted as representing the gradual loss of childhood, and the line 'I was not a child anymore' was widely noted as a clear turning point.

Stronger responses demonstrated a nuanced understanding of the narrator's complex emotional state, identifying both warmth and emotional distance in her relationship with her parents. These candidates carefully examined how Kincaid's language, structure, and form convey the narrator's inner conflict as she transitions into adulthood.

Less successful responses tended to generalise, using terms like 'hatred' or 'dislike,' which failed to reflect the emotional subtlety of the extract. Some lacked meaningful analysis of technique, limiting their interpretation and missing the understated tension that shapes the narrator's experience.

Section B

Question 7

Most candidates understood how the novel is structured in part by the changing nature of the mother/son relationship. The centrality and significance of the relationship in candidates' reading meant that nearly all candidates were able to set the notion of David as his mother's 'sun' against the idea of him as a 'monster' – with a very clear sense of personal emotional shock and engagement with this terrifying development. Candidates explored how Carla's maternal role shifts when she allows a 'spiritual migration' to save David's life, resulting in him becoming, in her words, 'not the same' — emotionally altered and eerily observant. They remarked on how Carla describes David as someone watching her, judging her, and no longer needing her in the way a child should need their mother. The strongest responses considered how Carla seems torn between love, fear, and regret for the decision that changed him. They explored how the dynamic between mother and son is reversed: rather than Carla being the guiding protector, David seems to have an almost sinister control or influence over her.

Some explored whether she was already aware of the disfiguring environmental pollution as she checked his fingers not once but twice. There was close detail to the writer's use of language, referring to her constant reference to past tense and how their relationship used to be and the way she prayed desperately when she realised he was ill. Some considered her reaction to the way he speaks to her, for example calling her Carla instead of Mum. Strong responses referred to her palpable fear of David being alone in the house with Nina.

and failure to act on her husband who searched for David in the night. They referred to the guilt she expresses, for example in being concerned about the horse rather than her son.

Many candidates compared their relationship with that of Amanda and Nina, citing the way the rescue distance indicates their bond. Some of these explored how Schweblin uses Amanda's reactions to guide the reader's response, citing her shock that Carla did not provide a hug after the transmigration and stating, 'children are forever'. Less successful responses wrote too little on Carla and David so were unable to demonstrate the 'reasonably developed' thread for achievement in Level 4. Some looked at Carla's jealousy of Nina, questioning whether Carla wanted Nina's transmigration to take place to get 'her' David back. Clearly, the text indicates this occurs as Nina's father drives away with her at the end of the novel.

Less successful responses simply considered her a cruel mum who cared more about the expensive horse than her child, ignoring him without outward signs of affection and jumping to conclusions, for example. killing the ducks, without attempting to talk to him. The fact she seems to frequently in her gold bikini added strength to her apparently poor maternal skills.

Question 8

Most successful responses explored her traditional mind set, wanting to fit in with societal expectations, her role as mother and wife and the conflict with her only daughter. There were some well-selected references to the 'pot' and Osam's laid back attitude making her seem the villain over Anowa's selection of husband. Her criticism of Kofi as 'cassava-man' and 'watery' were well noted, with the strongest understanding the reference to fertility. Her strident voice and cutting comments as well as her treatment of Osam were seen as making her memorable. Successful responses explored use of traditional idioms, her relationship with Osam and her struggle to reconcile her traditional views with her daughter's desire for greater independence. They analysed the stage directions, the emphatic way she challenges Osam and often quoted Anowa's powerful line 'Remove your witch's mouth from our marriage', focusing on the division between mother and daughter implied by the determiner's 'your' and 'our'. The pathos of her bringing Anowa home after her death was discussed by a few.

Most candidates focused on the early scenes with Anowa and her disapproval of her daughter who has chosen her own husband. Whilst Badua is undoubtedly critical of Kofi some candidates appeared to have set quotations learned here which shifted the focus more onto Kofi and away from Badua. The most successful candidates referred to stage directions and their significance. A few candidates sympathised with Badua for wanting the best for her daughter and pointed out that she was right about Kofi. Some candidates included Badua's wish for 'my child/To be a human woman' but few analysed this successfully. Badua's relationship with Osam was explored in context of her role as a traditional housewife, with many commenting on how she challenges these by being so outspoken. The strongest considered the contradiction in her assertion that 'a good woman does not have a brain and a mouth.'

Weaker responses wrote a brief character profile with little reference to how that made her memorable. They presented a uniformly critical and judgmental assessment of Badua, seeing her as a poor mother who drove away her daughter, rather than existing as a complex multi-faceted character. Some candidates had limited knowledge of Badua, perhaps having prepared for questions on Anowa or Kofi. These were only able to see her character in the way that Anowa reacts to her rather than as a character in her own right.

Question 9

Most candidates were able to trace Enaiat's challenges and journey in his hopes for a better life. The challenge lay in avoiding a straight re-telling of the plot, instead selecting material which demonstrates his determination to find a place where he can study and not fear deportation or abuse. Many explored his 'abandonment' by his mum in Pakistan and focused on her instilling in him rules for life— not drugs, weapons or stealing – as well as following and counting stars, symbolic of a brighter future. His determination, resilience, capacity to make friends and constancy in thinking of a brighter future were noted. His hazardous journey across the mountains was seen as a pivotal moment. Breaking one of his mother's rules in taking the dead man's shoes was justified as a testament to his determination to survive at all cost.

The most successful candidates were those who focused on the question rather than write more generally about his hardships. His moral values, instilled by his mother, were praised. His resilience and determination were illustrated through experiences such as the trek across the mountains and lying in the bottom of a lorry. Strongest candidates appreciated how he grew on the journey, how it shaped him. Those who were able to lead with Enaiat's words 'The hope for a better life is stronger than any other feeling. The decision to emigrate comes from a need to breathe' tended to write a clearly structured essay, particularly when they

focused on the language here. Some candidates referred to how his journey started as a Hazaran persecuted by the Taliban and many explored the bleak image ‘without school, life is like ashes’ and saw this as a driver in his search for a better life.

Some candidates cited Enaiat’s purchase of a watch as a personal possession that characterised his wish for better things in the future. They selected the visit to the supermarket in Greece as an example of a ‘paradise’ for Enaiat, noting that the promise of plenty was still tantalisingly out of reach. They referred to the old lady in Greece who helps Enaiat as evidence of the kindness of strangers and a reflection of how life could be better. They used traumatic situations and events as showing how adversity could be used as a stimulus for action: the shooting of the teacher in Afghanistan, for instance, was highlighted by many candidates as underscoring Enaiat’s appreciation of education and the hope that it would form part of his ‘better life’. Many candidates commented on Enaiat’s phone call with his mother at the end of the book.

The style of the book is matter of fact and quite simple, however successful responses considered the metaphorical or symbolic significance of barriers, checkpoints, mountain and sea crossings as obstacles in Enaiat’s path to a better life. When assisted by other Hazara boys during an attack by bullies in Pakistan, candidates commented on the ‘snow leopard’ simile and the ‘small army’ metaphor. Others explored the structure of Enaiat’s journey, for example, ‘Geda adopts a non-linear structure of narration with shifts between the past and present highlighting the pivotal role of memory in shaping Enaiat’s character and journey’; or, ‘The use of short declarative sentences (‘I was small...I was faster than bullets’) speaks of a self-encouragement that conveys his unwavering attempts to live on.’

Less successful responses retold events and described hardships faced by Enaiat, either without specific textual detail or lacking a focus on his search for a better life.

Question 10

Most candidates understood the cherry orchard’s symbolic significance regarding the family’s past, their vast wealth and social status as aristocrats. The contrast between Mrs Ranevsky’s view of the orchard and Lopakhin, the peasant-turned-businessman, was explored successfully by some candidates. Working context seamlessly into their response was a feature of the most successful responses. Many candidates understood that a way of life was ending, and some rejoiced in Lopakhin’s acquisition of the orchard and the sound of the axe at the end of the play, seeing his triumph as a peasant rising above his old ‘owners’. The contrasting views of Mrs Ranevsky, Lopakhin, and the younger generation were features of the best responses. They explored Mrs Ranevsky’s melodramatic departure and return to Paris as representative of those who do not change with the times. Responses which were critical of Mrs Ranevsky’s unwillingness to face the future of the cherry orchard explored her attitude to Lopakhin’s proposal to save it and reaction to the outcome of the auction. The character of Firs was sensitively explored by candidates who noted his comments on the cherries which once were sold, but now the recipe has been symbolically lost. His death and the symbolism of the stage directions relating to the falling axe were handled with some skill.

Successful responses explored how Chekhov balances sincerity with melodrama and over-sentimentality in Mrs Ranevsky’s comments about the cherry orchard and its significance in her childhood. They also commented on Gayev’s remarks about the orchard’s entry in the encyclopaedia as testimony to its significance but also his and his sister’s reluctance or inability to move on. Many commented on the more pragmatic approach by Lopakhin. The strongest responses explored language, for example the stage direction ‘excitedly’ in Anya’s reaction to news of the sale of the cherry orchard. This was often contrasted with the stage direction ‘weeping quietly’ to describe her mother and what this showed about the divide between the generations. Some commented on Trofimov and the way his views influence Anya’s views on the cherry orchard.

Higher level answers focused on the writer’s methods and effects and explored the characters’ vivid memories of the orchard with visions of the past intruding upon the present. Lower level responses tended to comment on Mrs Ranevsky’s love for the cherry orchard without exploring the language she uses to describe it.

A few misinterpreted the question as referring to the play in general. These were rarely able to go above ‘some understanding of the text’ in Level 3 as answers were very general and plot driven. Others spent too much time on socio-historical background of the aristocracy, serfdom and the Russian revolution.

Question 11

Most candidates explored the poet's anger and battle cry, urging nature to fight back even to death and not give up in the battle against human pollution and destruction of the 'wild country'. The linguistic richness of this poem with the focus on 'how' and 'emotions' gave all candidates an opportunity to engage personally with the text and task. Stronger responses answers identified and supported a range of relevant identified emotions (fury, disbelief, guilt, frustration, hope, despair) rather than a simple assertion that the writer was 'angry' and rightly so. They commented on Wright's use of imperatives, of repetition, of powerful adjectives, alliteration and sibilance, selecting the individual animals mentioned in the poem, while lower-level responses included little detail beyond 'Die, wild country.'

Some candidates started out by stating that Wright is angry with the people who destroy animals and nature but then struggled to explain clearly what is meant by 'wild country' and the similes chosen for nature to fight back with. The most successful candidates were able to analyse the effect of the anaphora with the imperative 'Die' and the effects of the sharp alliteration in 'Clawing and cursing' as the eaglehawk/ country fights ferociously to the death. Stronger responses made good use of the 'dozer blade' vs the 'ironwood' image and the 'conquerors and self-poisoners line' as supporting Wright's perspective that humankind's exploitation has been turned on itself. In commenting on the ironwood/dozer blade, one candidate stated that Wright was encouraging the trees to 'stay strong against deforestation and do harm to the thing that harms them'

Many candidates felt they needed to offer a considerable amount of contextual material to explain Wright's stance as an activist or issues of colonisation and environmental destruction. Wright's anger towards humanity's corruption, stupidity and responsibilities is relevant, but lengthy and often repeated comments at the expense of a consideration of language, form and structure made it more difficult for candidates to achieve the higher levels. Others were unsure about Wright's stance: she is attacking those who destroy the 'wild country' but also aggressively telling it to die, whilst retaining culpability as a member of the human race. The most successful candidates worked context in seamlessly with the contemporary allusions against de-wilding and Australian industrial practices, for example analysing the vulnerability and suffering Wright conveys through the language in 'your living soil' and 'naked poverty'.

The weakest responses struggled to recall and integrate sufficient textual detail on which to base close analysis of the writer's methods.

Question 12

There were too few responses to this question to make meaningful comment.

WORLD LITERATURE

Paper 0408/33

Set Text

Key messages

Successful responses:

- Show a detailed knowledge of texts.
- Address the question explicitly.
- Support their views with relevant textual reference.
- Explore closely the ways in which writers achieve their effects.
- Use much direct quotation in **Section B** answers to explore the detail of the writing.

Less successful responses:

- Have an insecure or limited knowledge of texts.
- Narrate or describe aspects of texts rather than answer the question.
- Make assertions which are not substantiated.
- Merely list or explain writers' techniques.
- Have an insufficient range of quotations to support views and explore aspects of the writing in **Section B** answers.

General comments

The few candidates for this paper all studied *Fever Dream* or the poetry anthology. In **Section B**, the majority answered **Question 7** on *Fever Dream* possibly finding it more challenging to explore *The Darkling Thrush* without the text printed on the question paper.

Most candidates divided their time well across their two answers for this paper and took note of guidance to focus on the question. There were fewer rubric errors in **Section B**, with most noting that the extract for **Question 1** should not be used to respond to **Question 7**. Fewer candidates wrote generic introductions to their text in the opening paragraph of their responses, occasionally simply listed techniques rather than providing a genuine introduction to the question.

The strongest answers showed a secure knowledge of the text, with candidates incorporating well-selected quotations to support their ideas. For **Section A** questions, the most successful responses made a developed response to the ways in which the writers achieved effects. For **Section B** questions, the most successful candidates were able to recall from the whole text a range of quotation which they deployed effectively in their response to the question. In less successful responses across both sections of the paper, an absence of direct textual support limited their analysis of the writer's methods. The weakest responses to **Section A** questions tracked the content of the extract without selecting relevant material with which to address the question or simply explained the meaning of quotations.

The most successful responses tailored their material to the key words in the question from start to finish: these answers engaged directly with those words in questions designed to elicit personal response.' They identified what was shocking in the extract from *Fever Dream* and saw how Reading is excited by the opportunity to see dolphins in *Cetacean*, even where they did not explicitly relate this to feelings of wonder. Most candidates endeavoured to refer to some of the language used to describe Amanda's impressions of Carla to focus on the adverb 'vividly'. Only a few failed to mention the key words, but sometimes made simple assertions about them.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

Most candidates addressed the central question of what makes the extract ‘shocking’ in their introductions, typically identifying visual imagery, diction and recurring themes as key techniques. A common approach was to link the idea of shock to a build-up of tension. While this connection is valid, some candidates veered off focus, treating tension as the main theme. This shift likely stemmed from classroom familiarity with the theme of tension, but it tended to shift the focus and therefore precision of their arguments in relation to the actual question.

Most candidates recognised the emotional distance between Carla and David, focusing on Carla’s shock at David’s behaviour – particularly his burying of a duck – as a pivotal moment. The line ‘He was four and a half years old, and he was burying a duck’ was often cited as shocking due to the contrast between David’s young age and the maturity and strangeness of his actions. Stronger responses deepened this analysis by examining unsettling imagery like the duck’s ‘eyes wide open’ and its neck ‘stretched out,’ contrasting the lifeless animal with the vitality associated with David’s youth.

Some candidates also commented on David’s appearance, for example how his ‘swollen’ eyes from crying revealed empathy, challenging Carla’s and the reader’s perception of him as emotionally detached after the transmigration. Others explored the theme of maternal love, often focusing on Carla’s apparent coldness and fear of David. That a mother might find her own child’s behaviour ‘alarming’ was frequently cited as particularly shocking. The contrast between David’s grim task of burying the duck and his use of a broken plastic spade was also noted by some as deliberately jarring. Lower-level responses, however, tended to rely on surface-level comments, such as identifying parts of speech without deeper analysis. Misuse of literary terminology, such as confusing ‘foreshadows’ with ‘foreshadows,’ occasionally hindered clarity and suggested a lack of precision.

Amanda’s momentary neglect of Nina – ‘I do not pay attention’ – was viewed by some as a powerful moment that hinted at her absorption and shock in reaction to Carla’s narrative and even a foreshadowing of Nina’s later poisoning. However, this interpretation was not always developed in detail. One strong candidate highlighted Carla’s use of violent verbs like ‘beats,’ ‘strangles,’ and ‘kills,’ noting how they seemed normalised by Carla within the rural setting. However, most candidates missed the opportunity to explore the wider cultural or social implications of such language choices.

Teachers should encourage candidates to engage with the entire extract, as the final paragraph—which hints at the real danger emerging from the surrounding wheat fields and describes it as ‘something threatening’—was generally overlooked despite its potential to prompt insightful analysis.

The strongest responses were marked by textual engagement, clear understanding, and analysis of language and imagery. These candidates remained focused on what made the extract shocking while exploring broader themes such as ecological horror and maternal detachment. One thoughtful observation linked the emotional disconnect between Carla and David to the wider disconnect between humans living in rural Argentina and the natural world that results in the overuse of pesticides and the people’s ignorance of their effects.

Question 5

Most candidates focused on exploring the poem’s ‘sense of wonder’ while a few shifted it to consider how the poem kept the reader ‘engaged’ and ‘interested.’ This approach perhaps suggests a difficulty in adapting prepared material to suit the specific demands of the question.

Strong responses identified that the poem’s style mirrors a scientific report, noting the use of factual language such as ‘observed’ and specific measurements like ‘sixty-three feet’ and ‘twenty feet longer.’ This was recognised as creating a formal tone that reinforced the observational perspective of the poem. Candidates also explored poetic techniques, including sibilance in ‘swimming slowly,’ linking the sound to the movement of water and the slowed pace of the poem, though some did not fully explore the effect of this slower rhythm. One candidate noted the consonance in ‘diminutive dorsals,’ observing how the repeated ‘d’ sound draws attention to the contrast between the small dorsal fins and the large bodies of the whales.

Responses placed in Level 5 and above demonstrated clear understanding, particularly in analysing the subtle tonal shift in the second half of the poem. The repeated use of the word ‘arched’ was identified as emphasising the whales’ movements, suggesting majesty and wonder. They examined enjambment in detail, identifying specific instances and explaining how it disrupted the structure to mirror the whales breaking the surface, creating a choppy, dynamic rhythm that reflected both movement and emotional impact.

Lower-level responses were marked by feature spotting with minimal analysis or explanation. For example, they identified the use of numerical figures in the poem but simply stated that they help the reader ‘picture the whale’s size,’ without offering any further interpretation. Another noted the descriptive phrase ‘grey as slate with white mottling,’ but commented only that it ‘paints a picture,’ offering no exploration of the effect or purpose behind the image. Similarly, the line ‘slipping into the sea... at a shallow angle’ was quoted, but the candidate explained its effect by merely rephrasing the original words—saying it shows the whale disappearing—without insight into how or why this image contributes to the overall impact of the poem.

These responses also had limited analysis of structural features. Although enjambment was sometimes identified, its purpose remained vague, with one candidate claiming it helped to ‘glue the poem together,’ a phrase that lacked precision or analytical depth. Teachers may wish to encourage candidates to focus more closely on individual words and phrases, and to explore what they make the reader think or feel, with a clear emphasis on the *how* and *why* of the poet’s choices.

Question 7

Most candidates correctly responded to the focus of the question, which asked about Amanda’s impressions of Carla, rather than simply describing Carla as a character. Candidates generally demonstrated an understanding of how Amanda’s initial perception of Carla evolves over the course of the novel. One candidate perceptively referred to the ‘indirect tensions’ that build between the two women throughout the narrative.

A common theme in the responses was Amanda’s initial admiration of Carla, particularly her beauty and apparent freedom. Several candidates discussed the recurring image of the ‘gold bikini,’ interpreting it as a symbol of Carla’s allure. One stronger candidate highlighted the irony that while Amanda may envy Carla’s beauty, Amanda’s loving relationship with Nina is ultimately more admirable. Few candidates explored the undercurrent of sexual attraction in their relationship, although one made an intriguing reference to the ‘repulsive attraction’ Amanda feels towards Carla, citing the line ‘she strangely repulsed me’ as evidence of their complex dynamic.

Stronger responses noted how Amanda’s and the reader’s perceptions of Carla shift as Carla recounts the events involving David. Amanda’s growing unease stems largely from the contrast between their approaches to motherhood. Amanda’s belief that ‘children are forever’ is starkly at odds with Carla’s emotional detachment, giving Carla an increasingly dark and sinister quality. A few candidates briefly referenced Carla’s reaction to David’s behaviour from the extract in **Question 1**—particularly how she found it ‘alarming’—though these comments were fleeting and did not impact overall marks. Teachers may wish to remind candidates that **Section B** responses should focus on the novel more broadly, not on the **Section A** extract as doing so will only serve to waste their time.

Some responses explored how Carla’s unsettling remarks—such as her wish to have a daughter like Nina—contribute to Amanda’s growing alarm. This culminates in Amanda’s horror when she realises Carla has taken Nina to the greenhouse to experience transmigration without her consent. Many candidates identified this unfolding of events as central to Amanda’s transformation of Carla from an admirable woman to a threatening figure. Others reflected on Amanda’s confusion, noting the troubling shift in Carla’s descriptions of David from her ‘light’ and ‘sun’ to a ‘monster,’ reinforcing Amanda’s sense of doubt and fear.

In general, there was less detailed language analysis than in **Section A**, though this is to be expected. Candidates would benefit from learning and revising key quotations and analysing their language, provided this does not lead to forced or irrelevant commentary. The strongest response included thoughtful analysis of language and structure, noting the repetition of ‘gold bikini,’ the effect of words like ‘monster’ and ‘monstrous,’ the recurring phrase ‘it happens,’ and the use of ambiguous diction, all demonstrating awareness of the writer’s craft.

While none of the candidates resorted to simple narrative summary, less successful responses lacked sustained textual analysis. Successful responses effectively connected language and structural techniques to Amanda’s evolving impression of Carla.

Question 11

There were insufficient responses to make useful comment.