

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 8695/21
Writing

Key messages

Candidates should manage their time carefully, allocating an equal amount of time for each section of the paper. Within this allocation of time, candidates are further advised to devote a set amount of time to identifying factors for writing, planning to write, writing, checking, and correcting.

When reading the questions, candidates should concentrate on the instructions and should carefully interpret and deconstruct the question. They should look at the key instructions in the questions they choose. For example, in **Question 3** the key instruction is to 'write a descriptive piece' and the key areas of focus are 'light', 'colour' and 'the scale of the building'. In **Question 6** the key instruction is to 'write the voiceover script' for a TV report and to 'create a sense of atmosphere and enjoyment'. To ensure that candidates do understand the key requirements of each question, it may be helpful to underline key words within the question.

Planning is key to a successful composition; candidates should plan for the prescribed form, purpose, audience, voice, mood and tone of the piece. Effective planning, following on from successful interpretation of the question (as above), leads to well-crafted and well-shaped responses, therefore minimising irrelevant detail and blandly generic content. They should give careful consideration to the particular effects they need to create, the most appropriate persona to adopt, the content to include, and the structure to employ.

Candidates must understand the importance of writing in clear, properly punctuated English, with accurate sentence demarcation, to perform well in this exam. Clear expression in simple and compound sentences without much variety is preferable to expression in long, rambling sentences that do not flow as easily. Often, weaker candidates lose control of grammar when they attempt to write in long complex sentences. They must also be aware of the need for effective paragraphing in their responses.

Candidates should be encouraged to proofread carefully, particularly for accurate sentence demarcation and for tense confusion or inconsistency. Such errors impede, sometimes seriously, the overall sense of fluency and cohesion.

In preparing for **Section A: Imaginative writing**, candidates should develop skills in differentiating between 'showing' versus 'telling', to improve both descriptive and narrative skills. Candidates must seek to utilise a broad range of effects in their work. The key aspect of the most successful and effective writing in **Section A** is a convincing and credible narrator, persona or voice.

When preparing for **Section B: Writing for an audience**, candidates should be encouraged to read a wide variety of newspaper and magazine articles, both print and online, as background preparation. Candidates should be exposed to the tone, register and format of magazine articles, newspaper correspondence, speeches and voiceover scripts. The key aspects of the most successful and effective writing in **Section B** are a clearly developed, logically sequenced structure, together with an authentic sense of voice.

General comments

Quite a number of submissions self-penalised on the grounds of rubric infringement: some responses were appreciably short of the minimum word limit. Candidates should practise writing time-limited tasks to a specific word length.

In **Section A, Question 1** was the most popular, followed by **Question 2**. There was sometimes a tendency to write stories in **Question 3**, when descriptive writing was required. Although it is quite acceptable to use a narrative framework for a descriptive piece of writing, the focus must be on description. For **Section A**, strong responses were those with an original flavour and a convincing sense of place, character or atmosphere; for example, when the reader was able to relate to the sense of mystery and apprehension in **Question 1**; explore the contrasting viewpoints provided by both age and perspective in **Question 2**; or appreciate the descriptions of the light and the colour and scale of the building in **Question 3**. Where some candidates fell down in their imaginative writing, it was often due to lack of structural control (sometimes a complete response was devoid of paragraphs) or a lack of suitable language devices to create effects. A number of answers were hampered by tense confusions, especially when attempting to create drama or a sense of time passing in **Question 1**.

In **Section B, Question 5** was the most popular, followed by **Question 4**. Fewer candidates attempted **Question 6**. The more successful **Section B** answers kept the target audience in mind throughout and adopted language and structural techniques to match that audience. Weaker responses were unable to use the conventions of different forms, establish a mature, credible voice or develop a well thought out, logically organised line of argument.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Imaginative writing

Question 1 – On The Run

Candidates were asked to write the opening of a story called *On The Run*, about a person who has had to change their identity and move to a new location. They were asked to create a sense of mystery and apprehension.

This was the most popular question among the six available. Most candidates were able to write about both the new location and a change in identity. A variety of personae were invented in all sorts of situations, though many involved running from a crime.

Stronger candidates managed to generate tension and mystery by skilfully creating characters that were in danger. These candidates also kept the reader guessing by gradually revealing the mystery of the story. The stories included outcasts and ordinary people who were scarred by life's adverse events. For example, one of the characters was described as having '*her face hardened by a life full of mistakes*'. The settings were equally well described; for instance, one of the characters trying to escape was depicted as being locked in a '*camera infested corridor*'. Well-integrated backstories were a feature of some better responses. Some really effective writing centred on multiple personalities, in one case involving a schizophrenic syndrome. Another imaginative and engaging response changed point of view from first person to third as the individual began to lose touch with their former name and personality, creating a thoughtful dilemma for the reader.

Weaker candidates struggled to find a reason why a character needed to change their identity. The plot often described an abusive relationship, murder or someone running away from the police. This kind of plot often included a car chase or escaping to another country on a plane. Very often the characters were met by their perpetrators at the end which left the writing on a cliff-hanger. Weaker candidates often employed plots that were too elaborate, with too many characters involved, leading to a lack of narrative control. Stories of dysfunctional families that needed to be avoided were also common, but rarely given a contextual background. There were plenty of rough hair cutting jobs in railway station 'restrooms' in order to change identity, but this was usually a crude plot contrivance. Too often the candidates used a 'telling' and not a 'showing' technique, which did not allow for the sense of mystery and apprehension to be created.

Question 2 – Contrasting pieces about space

Candidates were asked to write two contrasting pieces, of 300–450 words each, about space. Candidates were asked to write the first piece about an astronaut in space, looking down on Earth and the second about a young child on Earth, looking up at the moon. They were asked to focus on the feelings of each person and to create a sense of wonder.

This was also a reasonably popular question and most candidates were able to provide a contrast between the voices of the grown-up astronaut and the moonstruck child.

Stronger candidates often used third person narration, thus allowing them to assume the position of the observer of the protagonists, as well as of the scene. These candidates typically used a highly descriptive and sophisticated vocabulary to present the beauty of Earth, as well as the minute details of the spaceship or shuttle. The same quality was mirrored in the description of the child looking at the moon. Some of the stronger responses generated two different points of view from the same 'character' in that the child grew up to be that astronaut; in some cases, and very effectively, the story of the child was incorporated into the astronaut's musings.

Weaker candidates nearly always used first person narration, which often included the astronaut's internal monologue, in which he or she reminisced about the people whom he or she had left on Earth; for example, *'I wonder what they are doing now? Do they miss me?'* Feelings were sometimes reduced to very basic descriptions of teary eyes, while the young child, on the other hand, wondered whether the moon was made of cheese and whether aliens lived hidden in the moon's craters. Weaker answers tended to describe clichéd *'marble of green, blue and fluffy white clouds'* scenarios, from the astronaut's point of view, and very grown-up sounding children who discussed vague philosophies about the moon's place in the heavens.

Question 3 – The Skyscraper

Candidates were asked to write a descriptive piece about a skyscraper, focusing on the light, and the colour and scale of the building.

Sometimes this question was treated as if it required a narrative response, though not as often as in some previous cases. Sometimes candidates began with a narrative first page, often involving a visit by the narrator's family or friends to the building, but then worked this into a more descriptive continuation. Most candidates were able to picture the scale, light and colour effects required by the question.

With stronger candidates, this question elicited some powerful imaginative writing. They were able to keep to the descriptive stance throughout the piece and to create an image of the building as an impressive structure. The colour and the light were described with subtlety and precision. The candidates used imagery, powerful adjectives and senses to create a vivid and believable scene. Some candidates described the skyscraper at different times – during the day and during the night, or during different seasons – observing the changes that had taken place and this approach encouraged different views, light formations and so on. Some of the more interesting answers involved a tour of the inside of the building as well as gazing at the outside's immensity.

Weaker candidates used the title merely as a stimulus for a narrative story, with little description or detail. These stories included many characters and some kind of plot but failed to achieve effects. Many candidates tried to convey the scale of the building through rather clichéd statements, such as, *'pedestrians walking along the sidewalk seem like ants compared to the skyscraper.'* Descriptions were often limited to a view of a skyscraper that *'touched the clouds'* or was *'infinitely big'*. Weaker candidates tended to use all their descriptive ideas at the beginning, leaving the remaining part of the response almost entirely narrative in character.

Section B: Writing for an audience

Question 4 – Review of a music festival

Candidates were asked to write a review of a music festival, to be published in their school magazine

The candidates referred to a number of festivals such as Coachella, SunFest and Rolling Loud, and many candidates included the names of the artists and the titles of their songs in their responses. This was often in the form of a simple description of the performances, food and ticket prices. However, most of the candidates did write in a style which would have been appropriate for a school magazine.

Stronger candidates concentrated on specifics and were able write in a lively, engaging and original way, clearly having planned the task carefully. They sometimes used subtitles that signposted the reader to diverse aspects of the festival such as food, setting, weather, music, prices, facilities, merchandise and the overall experience. Some of the reviews were quite critical of the music's quality. For instance, one candidate wrote, *'We had been promised a scintillating display of auditory elegance; instead, we heard an attempt at noise'*. Stronger candidates kept the form of review throughout the piece and offered a well-informed opinion based on the evidence they presented.

Weaker candidates were often vague in their responses, sometimes failing to mention the name or nature of the festival at all. They tended to answer the task in the form of a recount, retelling what happened to them from the moment they entered the grounds of the festival. Vagueness and generalisations epitomised these answers, which were not very helpful to their readers or appropriate to the form: often any evaluation was reduced to a final statement such as, *'Overall, I thoroughly recommend this festival.'*

Question 5 – Speeches about choosing a job

Candidates were asked to write two contrasting speeches, of 300–450 words each, about homework. They were asked to write one speech for someone who recognises the benefits of homework and one speech for someone who feels that students should not have to do more schoolwork at home.

This was the most popular question in **Section B**. Candidates usually argued that homework was beneficial for the students' future careers, improving their grades and developing their self-discipline. On the other side of the debate, they argued that schoolwork contributed to the deterioration of students' mental health, their loss of precious time with family and friends, or that it was simply unnecessary, as the students already had more than enough work at school.

Stronger candidates assumed an authoritative stance and maintained the appropriate form. They used a range of rhetorical devices such as rhetorical questions, statistics, different sentence structures, direct address and powerful vocabulary. The best responses were formal in tone and convincing, challenging others' opinions in an incisive, yet polite, manner.

Weaker candidates wrote their speeches in the form of essays, which resulted in the loss of immediacy that the speeches required. They also repeated ideas and even whole sentences in both parts of the task, the only difference being the stance, either for or against homework. Many weaker candidates also failed to use paragraphs which affected the organisation of ideas and arguments. In some cases, the candidates did not have sufficient vocabulary to express some of the more complex ideas. For example, one candidate wanted to express the idea that you will always be rewarded for your efforts when she or he said that if you *'put inputs, outputs will surely come.'* Many candidates used the sayings *'practice makes perfect'* and *'all work and no play make Jack a dull boy'* to make their points.

Question 6 – Voiceover for a TV report on a local event

Candidates were asked to write the voiceover for a TV report on a popular local event. They were asked to write a script covering part of the event itself, and some brief discussion of it afterwards, creating a sense of atmosphere and enjoyment.

Stronger candidates tended to skilfully combine an appropriately minimal description of each of the TV shots with the voiceover that accompanied it. They presented interplay between a visual impression of the imagined footage – partly implied and partly defined – and the verbal component of the voiceover text. In addition, stronger candidates observed the two-part structure of the question and separated the voiceover from the discussion; the comments appeared in the second part of the response.

Weaker candidates often wrote their responses in the form of an article or a conversation between two reporters commenting on the event, but this meant that there was little or no representation or implication of what was happening on screen. Furthermore, if there was any discussion, it was quite superficial and concentrated on more general observations, for example, *'It is amazing'*, and *'People are having a great time.'*

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Planning is key to a successful composition; candidates should plan for the prescribed form, purpose, audience, voice, mood and tone of the piece. Effective planning, following on from successful interpretation of the question (as above), leads to well-crafted and well-shaped responses, therefore minimising irrelevant detail and blandly generic content. They should give careful consideration to the particular effects they need to create, the most appropriate persona to adopt, the content to include, and the structure to employ.

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Candidates should be encouraged to proofread carefully, particularly for accurate sentence demarcation and for tense confusion or inconsistency. Such errors impede, sometimes seriously, the overall sense of fluency and cohesion.

In preparing for **Section A: Imaginative writing**, candidates should develop skills in differentiating between 'showing' versus 'telling', to improve both descriptive and narrative skills. Candidates must seek to utilise a broad range of effects in their work. The key aspect of the most successful and effective writing in **Section A** is a convincing and credible narrator, persona or voice.

When preparing for **Section B: Writing for an audience**, candidates should be encouraged to read a wide variety of newspaper and magazine articles, both print and online, as background preparation. Candidates should be exposed to the tone, register and format of magazine articles, newspaper correspondence, speeches and voiceover scripts. The key aspects of the most successful and effective writing in **Section B** are a clearly developed, logically sequenced structure, together with an authentic sense of voice.

General comments

Quite a number of submissions self-penalised on the grounds of rubric infringement: some responses were appreciably short of the minimum word limit. Candidates should practise writing time-limited tasks to a specific word length.

In **Section A, Question 1** was the most popular, followed by **Question 2**. There was sometimes a tendency to write stories in **Question 3**, when descriptive writing was required. Although it is quite acceptable to use a narrative framework for a descriptive piece of writing, the focus must be on description. For **Section A**,

strong responses were those with an original flavour and a convincing sense of place, character or atmosphere. For example, the reader was able to relate to the sense of drama and anticipation in **Question 1**; explore the contrasting viewpoints provided by both age and perspective in **Question 2**; or appreciate the sense of mood and atmosphere in **Question 3**. Where some candidates fell down in their imaginative writing, it was often due to lack of structural control (sometimes a complete response was devoid of paragraphs) or a lack of suitable language devices to create effects. A number of answers were hampered by tense confusions, especially when attempting to create drama or a sense of time passing in **Question 1**.

In **Section B**, **Question 4** was the most popular, followed by **Question 5**. Fewer candidates attempted **Question 6**. The more successful **Section B** answers kept the target audience in mind throughout and adopted language and structural techniques to match that audience. Weaker responses were unable to use the conventions of different forms, establish a mature, credible voice or develop a well thought out, logically organised line of argument.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Imaginative writing

Question 1 – As the sun started to rise

Candidates were asked to write a story which begins with the following sentence: *As the sun started to rise, I knew exactly what I had to do*. They were asked to create a sense of drama and anticipation.

This was the most popular choice from **Section A**. A lot of candidates did not write a complete story but ended their stories with a cliff-hanger, leaving the reader to contemplate a possible conclusion to the story.

Stronger candidates focused on the opening line and came back to it throughout their writing, while using language effects to create drama and anticipation. The central character was often convincing and easy to believe in and the number of characters in the story was limited, making the narrative easier to follow. Equally, the setting and time frame were kept simple and believable. Whether minor or major, the drama in such responses tended to be realistic, with a sense of anticipation increasing towards the story's climax. The central events of such stories varied, from ending a relationship to starting a new life in a different country.

Weaker candidates often made no further mention of the idea in the opening line once they had started with it and the rest of the story therefore lacked a clear link to the question. A sense of drama and anticipation was not always evident. Weaker candidates also employed plots that were too elaborate, with too many characters involved, leading to a lack of narrative control. They sometimes failed to create characters at all or move beyond a first-person narrative of present tense events, some of which unconvincingly incorporated horror genre conventions and clichés. Sometimes there was too much emphasis on the backstory and stories too often ended in very unlikely cliff-hangers.

Question 2 – Contrasting diary entries

Candidates were asked to write two contrasting diary entries, of 300–450 words each, about a young teacher's first day of work. Candidates were asked to write the first piece as the teacher and the second as a student in her class. They were asked to create a sense of the writers' differing attitudes and perspectives.

Often there was a very stereotypical view of the roles of teacher and pupil which meant there were many very safe and similar answers.

Stronger candidates used the contrasting part of the question to their advantage. They were able to create different voices and perspectives successfully by carefully selecting details which were convincing. The strongest responses often employed an effective parallel structure to present the teacher and student personas in direct contact (or confrontation) during the lesson in question, quite often both self-conscious and anxious about being 'new'. They kept a tight focus on the writing being about that first day and did not bring in confusing backstories.

Often weaker candidates did not offer much sense of contrast in the diary entries. They sometimes went into lengthy backstories or rambled off into matters not related to the school day, such as shopping and cooking in the evening. Some weaker candidates got bogged down in the details of what the new teacher was wearing or described an elaborate journey to school which then did not leave much time for more meaningful contrasts.

Question 3 – The Queue

Candidates were asked to write a descriptive piece called *The Queue*, creating a sense of mood and atmosphere.

Generally, the question generated some good quality descriptive responses, with some quite imaginative choices of queue, such as at a border control, a passport office or for an event.

Stronger candidates maintained focus on description rather than wandering off into narrative. Many used airports or bus stations for the location of the queue, with vivid sensory descriptions employed to create atmosphere and mood. Some of the stronger responses incorporated detailed observational ‘portraits’ of other, similarly unwilling people in the queue, essentially utilising a vignette approach which tended to work quite successfully. Some of the more unusual reasons for queuing seen in candidate responses included obtaining medical supplies, or aid after a disaster.

Weaker candidates laboriously described what they could see in a list-like structure without any development or sense of mood and atmosphere. Some allowed their answer to become a narrative, forgetting that the question asked for description, or lost focus on the queue and its mood and atmosphere. Some candidates devised an unrealistic, sometimes futuristic, setting that was not always convincing.

Section B: Writing for an audience

Question 4 – In Good Shape

Candidates were asked to write an article for their school magazine called *In Good Shape*. They were asked to suggest the best ways for young people in their area to keep fit and healthy without having to spend much money.

This was a very popular question and candidates were generally able to write in an appropriate style for a school magazine.

Stronger candidates kept both parts of the question in mind: keeping fit and saving money. There were some very engaging and entertaining answers that were very relevant to the specified audience and gave some specific examples to develop their response; these included improved diet, low impact cardiovascular exercise, using public outdoor amenities, exercising with a friend for mutual support, or participating regularly in a sport. Stronger candidates used subheadings appropriately and effectively to break down the information into more digestible sections. They also used anecdotes effectively, to show how they had achieved fitness without spending much money.

Weaker candidates produced articles that were often too general and did not address the audience clearly enough. Often only one half of the question was addressed with the cost sometimes being ignored. Although they correctly identified what you can do to stay healthy, they tended to simply write out that information in an unstructured way. Weaker candidates tried to address the audience by using slang but in the context of a school magazine this did not always work. There were many comments of the ‘*Go Bobcats!*’ variety, presumably in an attempt to address the school audience, but often this did not work fully as it was not supported by providing other references to the reader. Some candidates utilised an anecdote of being unfit or overweight, but did not always link it very well to the question.

Question 5 – Speeches about starting and finishing times for the school day

Candidates were asked to write two contrasting speeches for a debate, of 300–450 words each, about whether the school day should start and finish later. They were asked to write one speech agreeing with the idea and one speech opposing it.

Candidates seemed to find the debate format helpful in providing a structure for their responses. However, the difficulty some candidates faced was in offering a range of plausible points for both sides of the topic and thereby establishing contrasting voices.

Stronger candidates knew the rules and conventions of debate and made the context of their speeches clear. They included a wide range of arguments with good examples and clearly delineated their points following salutation to the audience. They created contrasting voices, and mature arguments were given on both sides. Devices such as rhetorical questions and emotive language were successfully employed and candidates included convincing statistics and anecdotal evidence in support. There were some passionate answers and it was obviously a topic to which candidates could relate.

Weaker candidates wrote their speeches in the form of two unlinked essays, which resulted in the loss of immediacy that the speeches required. They did not have many points to make, often becoming repetitive and failing to maintain clearly opposing positions. Many weaker candidates also neglected to use paragraphs, which affected the organisation of ideas and arguments. Such responses were often uneven, usually with more development of proposition than opposition.

Question 6 – Voiceover for a TV report

Candidates were asked to write the voiceover for a TV report about the successful launch of a space shuttle. They were asked to cover part of the actual event and some discussion of it afterwards, creating a sense of admiration and excitement.

Few candidates chose this question. The second part of the question was overlooked by some candidates and the sense of admiration and excitement was missing from some of the responses. The tendency in such responses was to focus solely on the voiceover and a word for word description of what happened.

Stronger candidates had a good grasp of what a voiceover should sound like. They demonstrated a range of suitable reporting conventions via the voiceover script, with the reporter in the foreground with launchpad visible at a safe distance, and an expert, such as a previous astronaut, conveniently located off camera in a remote location via video link until required for the post-launch discussion. The idea of a script was embraced with a good balance of describing what could be seen on screen and what was being said by one or more presenters. Clear discourse markers were used to show when coverage or comment was handed over to another presenter or expert.

Weaker candidates showed little discernible understanding of the format and purpose of a voiceover script and appropriate form and content was not always clear; for example, one candidate wrote a descriptive piece on travelling into space.

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General comments

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strong responses were those with an original flavour and a convincing sense of place, character or atmosphere; for example, when the reader was able to relate to the sense of suspense and drama in **Question 1**; explore the contrasting viewpoints provided by both age and perspective in **Question 2**; or appreciate the descriptions of colours, sounds and movements in **Question 3**. Where some candidates fell down in their imaginative writing, it was often due to lack of structural control (sometimes a complete response was devoid of paragraphs) or a lack of suitable language devices to create effects. A number of answers were hampered by tense confusions, especially when attempting to create drama or a sense of time passing in **Question 1**.

In **Section B**, **Question 5** was the most popular, followed by **Question 4**. The more successful **Section B** answers kept the target audience in mind throughout and adopted language and structural techniques to match that audience. Weaker responses were unable to use the conventions of different forms, establish a mature, credible voice or develop a well thought out, logically organised line of argument.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Imaginative writing

Question 1 – Lost and Found

Candidates were asked to write the end of a story called *Lost and Found*. They were asked to create a sense of suspense and drama.

This was the second most popular response from Section A and in general candidates responded well, showing enthusiasm and imagination.

Stronger candidates were aware that they had been asked to write the ending of a story. They were able to begin at an appropriate moment in the plot and continue the narrative in a clear, focused manner, creating a sense of suspense and drama both in the language used and in the sequencing of events in their narratives. The more successful stories identified the object that had been lost and created a narrative, rather than relying on descriptions of the emotions the protagonist felt upon finding whatever it was they had lost. They used a range of devices, including convincing dialogue, and they were also able to use a blend of narrative and descriptive writing, and focused on a style of 'showing' rather than 'telling'. Some of these stronger, more focused responses had evidence of adopting a specific genre, such as crime fiction or thriller. A few candidates adopted the genre of fantasy and their narratives included elements of magic and mythology.

Weaker candidates had some difficulties in writing an ending that was clear, without having to explain previous parts of the plot leading up to this point; some resorted to flashbacks to clarify the narrative, which sometimes compromised the structure of the piece. Although some of these candidates had plausible ideas such as recovering a secret diary, their expression typically lacked variety and they were generally less able to maintain the reader's interest.

Very weak candidates' responses did little more than focus on the losing and finding of an object, such as a child's blanket or a puppy, and the responses were almost a list of facts. Some of the weaker responses had evidence of writing an entire narrative rather than just the ending. One key technical problem tended to affect this question: continuity of tense forms. Candidates often used a mix of tense forms, fluctuating back and forth unpredictably in mid-sentence.

Question 2 – Contrasting diary entries

Candidates were asked to write two contrasting diary entries, of 300–450 words each, about a girl who is going to stay with a family in another country as part of a school trip. Candidates were asked to write the first piece as the girl and the second as the girl's mother. They were asked to create a sense of the writers' outlook and mood.

Responses to this task usually involved an excited daughter and a sad parent. The main difficulties that candidates had were maintaining form and providing a contrast in voice. In many cases, the mother's perspective was stronger in terms of feelings than the girl's.

Stronger candidates offered more interesting angles, such as one who adopted the persona of a mother who was relieved her daughter was leaving; this approach enabled the candidate to explore more complex ideas. One candidate focused on conveying the youthful excitement of the girl in contrast to the nostalgic

sentimentality of the mother. The candidate used carefully chosen vocabulary and expression to reflect the ages and experiences of the two characters, which provided a strong sense of contrasting voices.

Weaker candidates tended to give a rather flat narration of the day, while the purpose of the writing – creating outlook and mood – was often secondary to the candidate's attempt to find the furthest-flung corner of the world for their character to be staying. This limited such responses, with the mother left wondering what her child might eat, for example, rather than describing her emotional response to her child's departure. Often there was not much contrast between the two halves: the daughter was excited, the mother was worried, but these were expressed without sufficiently varied vocabulary to make an impact. Some of the diary entries involved travel narratives, rather than focusing on outlook or mood.

Question 3 – A busy train station

Candidates were asked to write a descriptive piece about a busy train station, focusing on sound, movement and colour to help the reader imagine the scene.

This descriptive question was the most popular question in **Section A**. While there were a number of interesting perspectives offered, most candidates followed a single person through the train station, seeing what he or she saw. This tactic had one potential pitfall as, though it was potentially a successful approach, the response could slip into a piece that was more narrative than descriptive.

Stronger candidates had more unusual perspectives; for example, a homeless man watching the rush of activity as a train arrived or left, and the lull in activity between those events. There was some effective descriptive writing personifying trains and dehumanising travellers. One response described the scene using an extended metaphor, comparing the station to a stage. The strongest were typically those which focused on creating imagery through a variety of appropriate devices, such as the metaphor for a train unloading as '*the grey sea flowed onwards*'.

Weaker candidates tended to give rather lifeless descriptions of the train station, in some cases merely producing a list of events such as trains arriving and leaving, without much descriptive detail. Often, such responses lapsed totally into narrative, rather than descriptive, writing.

Section B: Writing for an audience

Question 4 – Letter about shops staying open 24 hours a day

Candidates were asked to write a letter in response to an article in a magazine about whether more shops should be open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. They were asked to respond to the article and to give their views.

Some responses were well-argued and even argued from both points of view to strengthen their case. However, there was also some repetition of points, presumably to increase the word count.

Stronger responses showed a definite awareness of form and style by using appropriate language and structural features, such as rhetorical questions. Such responses contained appropriate greetings, farewells and other relevant conventions, showing that candidates were fully aware of the purpose and audience. To aid development of their arguments, stronger responses made references to imaginary details from the imaginary article. Stronger responses tended to argue against the opening of more shops 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, defending the rights of employees and outlining the difficulties faced by shift workers. One original response was written from the point of view of a single mother working at Walmart and contained convincing arguments with an original and personal touch.

Weaker responses showed little awareness of form and purpose and were often written in the style of a magazine article. Arguments tended to be simplistic, underdeveloped and short in length. Weaker candidates seemed unable to assume the role of their constructed correspondents to engage fully with the task. The question was sometimes misunderstood and candidates produced a review of the mentioned article rather than presenting their views on the issues involved. Expressions such as '*The article was offensive*' occurred, often without development. On occasion, diary entries appeared instead of letters.

Question 5 – Speeches about choosing a job

Candidates were asked to write two contrasting speeches, of 300–450 words each, about the considerations involved when choosing a job. They were asked to write one speech suggesting that people should choose a job on the basis of a salary and one speech suggesting that job satisfaction is the most important consideration.

This was the most popular choice in **Section B**; the majority of candidates achieved an appropriate sense of voice and directed their discourse at an appropriate audience. Candidates seemed to find the debate format helpful in providing a structure for their responses. However, the difficulty some candidates faced was in establishing contrasting voices. Content invariably demonstrated contrasts but it was often difficult to tell the speakers apart.

Stronger candidates successfully created contrasting voices and mature arguments were given from both sides. Devices such as rhetorical questions and emotive language were successfully employed and candidates explored the ideas of being able to provide opportunities for their future offspring, such as paying university fees and securing a comfortable retirement. Some responses defended the idea of choosing a job based on job satisfaction by referring to entrepreneurs, including the success stories of Steve Jobs, Bill Gates and Mark Zuckerberg. The best responses showed an ability to use a full range of rhetorical devices in order to communicate with their school audience.

Weaker candidates wrote their speeches in the form of essays, which resulted in the loss of immediacy that the speeches required. Occasionally, there was some acknowledgement that the speakers were involved in a debate and adopted a spoken register, but often they were written as purely argumentative essays. The weakest responses merely listed undeveloped points. Arguments were not convincing and the speeches that argued for choosing a job based on salary focused on having enough money to buy ‘things’ and having a luxurious lifestyle. Some candidates simply ran out of ideas.

Question 6 – Voiceover for video on health and safety issues at school

Candidates were asked to write the voiceover for a video on health and safety issues at school, to be posted on the school website.

Stronger candidates demonstrated a full understanding of the task and of the features of a voiceover. One example used a clear structure with a constant focus on actions, pauses, deictic reference and direct address, which made for a successful piece. Direct address to teachers, with instructions, was given, for example, ‘*Teachers will need to close all blinds, make sure all students are accounted for*’ and to students, ‘*Students you need to...*’ concluding with ‘*That’s it!*’ There was also evidence of clear signposting such as, ‘*Our next topic ...*’

Weaker candidates experienced difficulties in creating a voice and maintaining an appropriate balance of deixis. Some of the health and safety issues outlined were relevant, such as the importance of staying on campus and the security protocol in case of an emergency. However, one response strayed into less relevant material by writing at some length about the dangers of taking drugs and drug-related deaths in the area.

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 8695/91
Poetry, Prose and Drama

Key messages

- Successful responses will focus on authors' choices of language and literary methods, and the effects these might have on a reader or audience.
- Responses which only recount knowledge of the content of texts and what subjects they explore are not successful.
- Specific references and quotations are needed to support points in essays. This should be particularly remembered for the (a) questions, where candidates select their own material to answer the question.
- Successful essays develop a line of argument in response to the question, developing points to a conclusion.
- Answers to (b) passage-based questions should examine the writing of the selected poem or extract in great detail.

General comments

Examiners were pleased to read many subtle and probing essays in response to the questions on the papers. Many answers showed a thoughtful exploration of the concerns of the texts and, crucially, of the effects of the methods the writers had chosen to communicate their ideas. There was some really observant and precise discussion of the language, imagery and structures used in poetry, prose and drama. The strongest answers recognise that such careful choices are not the reserve of poets and it is just as important to look closely at the writing of short stories, novels and plays. It is also crucial to show how such choices of language and the use of methods convey the developing meaning of the text; focusing on words, phrases or images abstracted from their context has little value.

It was noted during this series that a number of candidates had relied very heavily for their understanding and interpretation, particularly of poems, on a few internet sources and had taken those opinions as definitive judgements. This led to some narrow and skewed readings, where candidates would have been better advised to look carefully at the texts themselves and consider their own responses.

Comments on specific questions

1. Robert Frost: *Selected Poems*

- (a) The question on the presentation of the natural world gave candidates a wide choice of poems to use, with 'Out, Out-', 'Mowing', 'Home Burial', 'After Apple Picking', 'The Road Not Taken', 'Birches', 'An Encounter', 'The Wood-Pile' and 'Two Look At Two' being among the most popular. However, having chosen appropriate poems, many candidates drifted from the question and did not focus on the presentation of the natural world, instead writing a general essay about the poems chosen. Others focused on the human being at the centre of the poem. More successful responses avoided narrative accounts and focused explicitly on the question and considered how Frost presents elements of the natural world through his choices of language and imagery, whether those elements are snow, fallen leaves, trees or forests. From these close observations of the poetry they were able to move on to Frost's attitude to nature which becomes apparent from the way he presents it. There were interesting examples of essays which looked at his presentation of trees, in a poem such as 'Birches', and compared this with the telegraph pole, a denuded tree, in 'An Encounter'. There was interesting work too on the presentation of the fundamental forces of nature pushed to their limits by humankind in 'There Are Roughly Zones.'

- (b) The opening of *'The Black Cottage'* was a very popular option, though not many candidates acknowledged that the extract was the start of a longer poem. Many answers offered simple narrative summaries, often incorporating errors, such as that someone has been renovating the cottage because it has been 'freshly painted', not noticing that this has been done by a 'shower' of rain and the line is metaphoric. Slightly stronger answers commented on the mournful associations of 'black' and noted the 'weathered' appearance and secluded position in order to discuss the cottage's isolation and neglect, often linked with the death of its occupant. The strongest answers considered the whole extract carefully, noting the role of the guiding minister and the listening speaker and how the conversational tone reveals not just the history of the cottage, but through it, the family of the occupant and the attitudes and ideals of the American Civil War.

2. Elizabeth Jennings: *Selected Poems*

- (a) There were very few responses to this question, though religion is a central concern of Jennings' poetry. Though some chose appropriate poems, such as *'To a Friend with a Religious Vocation'*, *'In Praise of Creation'* and *'Harvest and Consecration'*, many answers did not progress beyond giving an account of the poems chosen. Stronger answers were able to show how religious faith and religious doubt are expressed through precise choices of language and carefully controlled metrical and rhyming patterns.
- (b) Several candidates were aware of Jennings' own medical history, though essays which allowed that history to dominate over a careful examination of the language of the poem were not successful. A few responses were able to place the poem in the context of the *'Sequence in Hospital'* with a grasp of the development of the wider text. The subtlety of Jennings' rhyme is such that many candidates asserted that the poem does not rhyme, even, in some cases, having listed the rhyme scheme. Strong answers considered the question's focus on the 'patient's state of mind' and looked at the shifts and developments which demonstrate the speaker's mental state. They noted the uncertainty of the opening question and the first stanza's examination of, and final subjugation to fear. The nihilism of the second stanza, with its focus on 'Noting' in the fourth line, was noted, before the shift marked by 'yet' at the beginning of the final stanza. The imagery of the 'shoots' was explored and the movement back towards life. Strong answers noted that the final phrase, 'Yet I am not the same', is a crucial one to show the changes in the patient's state of mind.

3. *Songs of Ourselves, Volume 2*

- (a) Candidates explored the expression of feelings of grief in poems like Jonson's *'On My First Daughter'*, Lewis' *'Song'*, Monck's *'Verses Written on her Deathbed'* and Wyatt's *'I Find No Peace'*. Often candidates showed a good knowledge of the poems but were less secure in selecting and directing that knowledge towards the wording of the question; often the answers progressed no further than describing the content of the poems. Stronger responses noted the form of the chosen poems, and how the development through structure mirrored the development of ideas. Such answers also looked carefully at the poets' choices of language and imagery used to present emotional depths.
- (b) *'The Migrant'* was an enormously popular option with a wide range of responses. The strongest were carefully observant of Hendriks' language and structure, looking at how the perspective on the migrant woman develops through the poem. They noted the detached point of view, observing the migrant, with the repeated use of the pronoun 'she', and the consistent use of the diction of travel: 'voyage', 'passage', 'travelled', 'transit', 'departure', 'movement', 'journey' and 'boarding'. Some commented that this motif of constant movement is also reflected in the varied, drifting stanzas, varying between end-stopped lines and enjambment. The disappointments for the migrant were noted, for example the hope that she is 'home' and 'Rooted and securely settled', noting the effects of the metaphor, before it is 'broken' that she is 'Committed' to further travel. This balance is also key to the penultimate stanza and many candidates responded with informed sympathy to the depiction of a wandering, stateless person, uncertain of destination, often putting that into the contemporary context of refugees and migration. The last stanza occasionally caused some confusion; the most successful answers noted a shift in perspective from 'she' to 'We', placing the speaker in the shoes of another passenger in the airport on a regular journey with friends or family, distanced from the migrant who is 'unutterably lonely'. Some interpretations saw the possibilities of seeing within the poem a metaphor for life, with the 'gate for *Embarking Passengers*' representing death. Several candidates, noting that Hendriks is a Jamaican poet, assumed the poem must be about slavery and imposed this interpretation solely on the poem without reading it carefully and responding to its language and expression, which led to truncated, limited readings.

4. Jhumpa Lahiri: *The Namesake*

- (a) The importance of Moushumi was widely recognised, though candidates who only offered a character summary, or used Moushumi's character to direct their essay at Gogol, were not successful. Better answers considered Lahiri's handling of Moushumi, delaying her full entrance in the novel after her brief appearance at Gogol's 14th birthday party. They considered the author's portrayal of Moushumi's cosmopolitan background, indicating her personal and cultural independence, and ways she is presented as a contrast with Gogol's previous girlfriends, especially Maxine. Very impressive were a number of answers which were able to use precise references and quotations to support the idea that Lahiri's presentation of Moushumi often prefigures her instability as a spouse and the fragility of her relationship with Gogol.
- (b) Most candidates recognised the contrast Lahiri creates between Ashoke's and Ashima's experiences in this passage, but the extract repaid careful attention and those who looked in detail at the writing were able to construct very fine essays. Such responses noted the suggestion of aspiration in the description of Ashoke's job as everything he had 'dreamed of' and noted the sense of beauty and harmony created throughout the first paragraph, with 'thrill', 'joy', 'sweeping view', 'pleasant days', 'melody of bells' and the 'sun-filled' library. There were some suggestions, with justification, that Lahiri presents Ashoke as rather self-absorbed, failing to notice his wife's less happy situation. While the contrast between the characters was noted by most, really sharp answers pinned it down to details of the writing, noting that Ashima's 'wishes' for a different position, contrasting with Ashoke's 'dream', and the library is used by both. While Ashoke sees his son's name and takes an interest in international affairs, Lahiri depicts Ashima taking Gogol to 'children's story hour', writing letters to her mother and reading Bengali books, showing her reluctance to engage in her American life. The repetition of 'no', highlighting what she misses, was picked up by many. Many also noted the beginning of her involvement in the international community by making and selling samosas. One or two interesting essays looked at Lahiri's choices of verbs, contrasting Gogol's confident 'run' with Ashoke's and Ashima's less certain 'wanders'.

5. Edith Wharton: *The House of Mirth*

- (a) Most candidates attempting this question recognised the importance of respect and reputation to the New York society at the centre of the novel. Several answers listed character in order to identify who had respect and who did not and considered the value of reputation within society. Many contrasted Bertha Dorset with Lily, acknowledging that Bertha's affairs are widely known but Wharton shows that she still commands respect and a surface reputation, while Lily is undone by baseless rumour about her own reputation. Some answers considered the role of Simon Rosedale, who possesses the wealth to achieve reputation and respect but is always held back because of his race. A very few thoughtful answers considered the moral implications of the terms 'respect' and 'reputation' and contrasted these for what passes as respect and reputation within New York society, thus demonstrating ways in which Wharton exposes the morally corrupt values of that society.
- (b) The passage produced some interesting personal responses, taking different views of Lily's situation. Many answers were alert to the ways in which the passage highlights Wharton's criticisms of society and the commodification of marriage and there was some interesting comment on Wharton's use of Carrie Fisher as a relatively minor character giving a different perspective. The variation in response came when discussing Lily's reactions to Carrie Fisher's suggestions, with some interpreting her 'faint laugh', 'increasing amusement' and 'incredulous gesture' as signs of superciliousness towards Mrs Fisher and a refusal to take her situation and her friend's help seriously. More persuasive were those responses which argued for Lily's attempted detachment and her inability to accept a husband she does not feel affection for, despite the precariousness of her financial position. Thus both George Dorset and the idea of breaking up a marriage for her own security are 'odious' to Lily, whereas Rosedale remains a clear possibility, even though his admiration is 'offensively evident'. Strong candidates picked up on this and were able to refer to Lily's later interview with Rosedale. Strong answers were able to comment carefully on Wharton's blend of dialogue, narration, and insight into Lily's mind provided in the passage.

6. *Stories of Ourselves*

- (a) The question on a sense of threat was very popular and nearly every answer featured *'The Lemon Orchard'*, which usually proved to be an excellent choice. It was paired with such stories as *'The Signalman'*, *'The Yellow Wall Paper'*, *'Meteor'*, *'Games at Twilight'* and Lim's *'Journey'*. Less successful responses took a narrative approach and summarised the threats evident in the stories, but many candidates were able to focus on ways in which the writers made those threats clear to the reader. With *'The Lemon Orchard'* there was often focus on setting, details of clothing, dialogue and direct reference to weaponry la Guma's use of an uncertain ending also continues the threat. Setting was also key to discussion of *'The Signalman'*, *'The Yellow Wall Paper'* and *'Games at Twilight'*, with the latter two stories also providing material for the representation of the central characters' imaginations and their understanding of the threats facing them. *'Meteor'* was sometimes used interestingly, discussing the Fortans' peaceable mission which lacks any threat, but encountering threats on earth from domestic animals and human beings which leave them completely vulnerable, despite their technological advances.
- (b) The passage from *'The Village Saint'* attracted a very large number of responses and many of these were thoughtful and observant. Some answers relied on narrative and character summary and some focused the whole essay on facades, but many examined the relationships depicted very carefully, noting the passage's development and the gradual revelation of what lies behind Mma-Mompati's and Mary Pule's facades. Candidates explored how the battle between the two women unfolds, and how Mompati exchanges one for the other at the end of the story. There was some very thoughtful engagement with diction, noting the language of appearance in 'people imagined' and 'they seemed' at the passage opening and the contrast between Mary's 'thin wilting, willowy dreamy' appearance and her hidden 'tenacious will', which prefigures how the story develops. The understatement of Mma-Mompati's 'little game' and her requirement for 'a teeny-weeny something' was often noted, and her aggression towards her daughter-in-law encapsulated in language such as 'despised' and 'wilting, plaintive little wretch'. Candidates commented on the language and imagery of her transformation, with plenty to say about 'vampire teeth', 'battle' and 'fury'. Examiners saw some thoughtful comments on the story's ending, often seeing Mompati in the same position with a different woman and discussing the relationship of Mma-Mompati with the village.

7. Wole Soyinka: *Death and the King's Horseman*

- (a) There were no responses to this question.
- (b) Candidates showed a solid grasp of the events of this scene and its significance in the play, though few looked closely enough at its dialogue and action to support a sustained suggestion of how an audience might react. There was some understanding of the pomposity and officiousness of Pilkings at the episode's opening and some awareness of the dramatic irony when he discusses 'the prisoner' in front of Olunde. The power of the striking moment when Elesin's voice is heard was noted in most answers but some important details of how Soyinka structures the scene were often missed. For example, some candidates were unaware that the dialogue between Elesin and Pilkings in ll.34–53 happens off stage, thus overlooking the impact of Elesin's final entrance, and some missed the visual effect of Olunde's immobile stance from the moment he hears Elesin's voice at l.37 to the end of the scene at l.71. It is important for candidates to pay attention to stage directions as well as dialogue and visualise their effects on stage.

8. William Shakespeare: *Henry IV Part 2*

- (a) There were no responses to this question.
- (b) There were no responses to this question.

9. Brian Friel: *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*

- (a) There were few responses to this question, but those attempting it showed their awareness of the presentation of Ballybeg as a dull, backward place lacking opportunities. Most answers referred to Gar's frustrations and desire to emigrate and described a number of key characters that epitomise Ballybeg's characteristics, usually S.B., the Canon and Gar's friends. Such answers approached the question of Friel's dramatic presentation implicitly; there was only some direct consideration of his shaping of the play, the patterning of sense in the present and from the past and the foil

provided by the Sweeneys, although often candidates missed the opportunity to discuss these ideas in detail.

- (b) This question attracted a number of comments on the nature of Gar's relationship with his friends, suggesting that it is a thin, unfulfilling bond between 'ignorant bloody louts'. Many answers did not go further than this, illustrated with some quotations from the passage. More careful answers, looking at the question's focus on dramatic presentation, saw more subtlety, noting, for example, the gift of the belt, which though not given in this passage, is referred to in the stage directions as a point of Gar's focus. Some also looked closely at Friel's structuring of hesitant dialogue after the bragging jokes about women, suggesting an undercurrent of emotion despite the admission that the friends had been invited by Madge. Gar's last speech as Private was also worth careful attention, beginning '*savagely*' with the comments about 'louts', but ending '*almost in a whisper*' about his 'memory' of 'fun' and 'laughing' with his friends.

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Comments on specific questions

1. Robert Frost: *Selected Poems*

- (a)** Candidates attempting this question usually chose appropriate poems, such as '*After Apple Picking*', '*Stopping By Woods*', '*The Cow in Apple Time*' and '*Gathering Leaves*', finding something to say about their seasonality. In many cases, essays were accounts of the poems with little close reference and or direct quotation. This made it difficult to consider the poems' effects, as those effects are produced by Frost's choices of language and poetic methods. Candidates who knew their chosen poems very well and supported their points with quotations were able to develop a comparative thesis and answered the question very successfully.
- (b)** Far more candidates answered on the extract from '*Home Burial*' and examiners read some very detailed and thoughtful responses. The most confident responses identified the grief and tension in the mood and atmosphere and looked carefully at setting and dialogue with focus on the couple's positioning on the stairs and their facial expressions. The tension in the interchange of dialogue was discussed, with its pauses, challenges, questions and repetitions. There were some interesting comments on the way Frost frames the graveyard in the window and leads to the climax of 'the child's mound' by first describing the other gravestones. The final section of the extract was very

important and a number of candidates fell short because they did not pay enough attention to it. It is important that the description of the graves is in the husband's voice and that he admits he is 'wonted to' the sight – his and his wife's differing responses to the view from the stairs are the core of the poem.

2. Elizabeth Jennings: *Selected Poems*

- (a) Too few responses to make a general comment appropriate.
- (b) There were not many responses to this question, but there was generally a clear recognition of the situation of the speaker. Several answers summarised the poem without giving careful consideration to the focus on the speaker's feelings, but those who were more observant of the question looked at ways in which those feelings are developed through the three stanzas. They commented that in the first two stanzas Jennings focuses on the patient's internal thoughts in preparation for an external show with a 'social smile' and 'ceremony' for the visitors – 'They'. Their presence and 'kindness' is acknowledged, but dealing with them is an effort after which the speaker is 'limp and faint'. Some commented that the 'attempt' to control is also apparent in the regularity of the stanzas and rhyme, subtly disguised through enjambment, and the shorter fifth line of each stanza heralds the final two lines' focus on internal emotion. Most candidates were able to identify the final stanza's shift to 'Your absence' after the presence of 'They' in the previous stanzas. There was some debate about the identity of the one who offers renewal in the final image of 'life' and 'rain', with many candidates suggesting that it could be God.

3. *Songs of Ourselves, Volume 2*

- (a) There were very few answers to this question, and the parting which most candidates focused on was death, using such poems as Jonson's '*On My First Daughter*', Monck's '*Verses Written on her Deathbed*' and Brontë's '*Last Lines*'. Considering parting on a wider basis, others wrote about Cassidy's '*Sons, Departing*' and Thomas' '*The Forsaken Wife*'. Some essays only identified the parting taking place and gave narrative accounts of the poems. More thoughtful responses compared not only different feelings, but ways in which these feelings are communicated in the poems, which of course was only possible for candidates who knew the poems well enough to make secure references and quote from them.
- (b) Far more candidates wrote on Dharker's poem, which was very popular. While there were some essays which focused on racism in general, giving a narrative summary rather than detailed analysis, many were attentive to the tone of the poem, picking up its mixture of frustration and bitterness but also its tactic of turning that into satirical laughter. Candidates commented that the experience was made personal to the reader by the consistent use of the second person pronoun and that the refrain of 'the times we live in' apparently suggests acceptance, but in fact expresses outrage. Many discussed the passport as a sign of identity, read 'backwards' while its owner 'shrinks' to its size. There was much discussion of the characterisation of the passport officer, with his 'mind working' over a name with a Z and suspicious examination of the photograph, often attributed to racism or Islamophobia and linked to diction with the dismissive 'flicks'. There was, though, some confusion in the readings of the poem, with some candidates taking some of the changes to 'birthmark', 'chin' and 'hair' literally, rather than a deliberately absurd satirical suggestion. However, there was some interesting discussion of what constitutes identity, and the aggressive diction of 'scrubbed' and 'rubbed'. The core of identity, and compassion, was noted in 'your heart', which is 'missed'. A number of candidates made thoughtful comments on the half face on the 'newspaper', which although it only 'rustles', has a much more significant impact in a world of growing suspicion in the wake of widely-reported terrorist attacks.

4. Jhumpa Lahiri: *The Namesake*

- (a) There were not many answers on Sonia, but candidates showed their awareness that her character provides a comparison with Gogol, and as the younger child, how she is shown to assimilate the American way of life more easily and with less parental opposition than her elder brother. Lahiri's presentation of her teenage rebellions was noted, her successful career and happy marriage to an American. Candidates also noted her support for Ashima and the growing closeness between mother and daughter following Ashoke's death.
- (b) The issue of names and naming is central to Lahiri's novel, which was recognised by most candidates. Some therefore treated this as an (a) question, without paying due attention to the

details in the writing of the passage. More alert candidates looked thoughtfully at Lahiri's creation of contrast between the flippancy of the Americans' attitudes to naming and how Gogol and Moushumi respond; the wider text was often used usefully to compare with the agony of naming Gogol. Perceptive responses looked closely at the writing, noting Lahiri's use of the present tense to create the immediacy of the situation and the blend of dialogue with Gogol's internal thoughts. They also explored Gogol's detached perspective and picked up little suggestions about the names which show the connection between him and Moushumi ('that odd bond'), but also hints which prefigure their relationship's collapse, with Gogol referred to as Graham and the things untold between them.

5. Edith Wharton: *The House of Mirth*

- (a) While there was some capable discussion of marriage and money in the novel, many candidates ignored the injunction to discuss the matter in the light of the quotation in the question, which directly equates the two. Examiners saw some developed discussion of Lily's conflict between marrying for money and marrying for love, and the role of Selden in this regard, while more wide ranging answers discussed the issues with reference too, to Wharton's range of secondary characters in the novel, including the Dorsets, Simon Rosedale and Percy Gryce. A few looked at Selden and Gerty Farish as Wharton's creation of an alternative view.
- (b) Among the few responses to this question, there were some thoughtful discussions, often considering how Wharton shows Gerty prompting Selden towards renewing contact with Lily despite her own feelings for him. Selden's lack of certainty was picked up in 'rising abruptly' and his 'walk to the window', his 'slight laugh', while Gerty's feelings are made clear by her tactics: she 'opened her case', 'her colour rose' and she 'blushed'. While the two characters discuss Lily, her reputation and fate, Wharton also creates a subtext of Gerty's own emotions, to which Selden is blind, referring to her patronisingly as 'My dear child'.

6. *Stories of Ourselves*

- (a) The stories in the collection feature a number of clear societies and communities, being the centre of such stories as 'Meteor', 'An Englishman's Home', 'The Village Saint', Grace's 'Journey' and 'Games at Twilight', for example. These were the stories usually chosen by candidates to respond to the question, with those trying to construct communities within stories such as 'The Signalman' and 'The Yellow Wall Paper' struggling to form convincing answers. A number of essays presented discriminating discussion of the hierarchy and class presented in 'An Englishman's Home', sometimes with impressive recall of dialogue, and Mma-Mompat's role within the village community was productively explored in 'The Village Saint', with Head's depiction of its changes. Others explored Grace's portrayal of the opposing values of the Maori community and the new officious style of land management in 'Journey', while the presentation of the community of children in 'Games at Twilight' was material for interesting exploration, looking at the children's roles within their hierarchy, with motherly Mira, hairy Ragu, little Manu and so on; with Ravi right at the end of the line.
- (b) This was a very popular question choice seeing a very large number of responses to the question on 'The Yellow Wall Paper' broadly dominated by feminist readings. Such readings are clearly relevant, though in many cases it became a general discussion drawing in the rest of the text, without much reference to the selected passage itself. Many answers which did stick to the passage only offered summary accounts of it, a disappointment when Gilman's writing is so characteristic here, with its shifts of focus, short sentences and paragraphs, dashes and exclamation marks, all of which are fundamental to the way in which the narrator's incoherent state of mind is communicated. Candidates tended to fare better with the language, with some thoughtful comment on Gilman's use of gothic, repulsive and violent imagery to show the narrator's mental state. There was much discussion of 'creeping' and a focus on the smell, although candidates did not always note how the woman's feelings towards it change. There was usually a good recognition that the reader is invited to see the woman in the wallpaper as a representative of the narrator particularly, and of women in general.

7. Wole Soyinka: *Death and the King's Horseman*

- (a) Too few responses to make a general comment appropriate.
- (b) There were no responses to this question.

8. William Shakespeare: *Henry IV Part 2*

- (a) Too few responses to make a general comment appropriate.
- (b) There were very few responses to this question. Among them, there was difficulty in articulating the scene's significance, though there was some recognition of the relationship between Prince Henry and Falstaff. Some candidates struggled with the identity of Poins.

9. Brian Friel: *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*

- (a) The few candidates responding to this question recognised that emigration to America is Gar's fantasy, but were less successful in demonstrating how Friel demonstrates dramatically that American life is a fantasy to him. Much attention was paid to the scene with the Sweeneys and the promises made to Gar about his future in America, but more could have been made of his songs, role-plays and routines which foresee a fantastically successful future in the United States.
- (b) In response to this question, a number of candidates showed their understanding of the idea that Private Gar desires some communication with S.B. and that Madge acts as potential mediator. Surprisingly, few used the insight Madge provides about S.B. not speaking when his wife died, and candidates often missed the stage directions referring to S.B.'s first appearance and costume. Some candidates suggested that Gar's rush to the door shows that he is afraid of his father, but more subtle responses suggested that Friel uses the stage direction as a sign that Gar subconsciously desires some contact with his father and imagines for a moment that he is going to acknowledge his son's departure. His gruff tones on opening the door show that the lack of communication between the two cannot be blamed entirely on S.B.. While the dialogue about barbed wire was often just repeated as summary, some candidates suggested that it symbolises barriers between the two men and suggests their relationship is a war zone.

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 8695/93
Poetry, Prose and Drama

Key messages

- Successful responses will focus on authors' choices of language and literary methods, and the effects these might have on a reader or audience.
- Responses which only recount knowledge of the content of texts and what subjects they explore are not successful.
- Specific references and quotations are needed to support points in essays. This should be particularly remembered for the **(a)** questions, where candidates select their own material to answer the question.
- Successful essays develop a line of argument in response to the question, developing points to a conclusion.
- Answers to **(b)** passage-based questions should examine the writing of the selected poem or extract in great detail.

General comments

Examiners were pleased to read many subtle and probing essays in response to the questions on the papers. Many answers showed a thoughtful exploration of the concerns of the texts and, crucially, of the effects of the methods the writers had chosen to communicate their ideas. There was some really observant and precise discussion of the language, imagery and structures used in poetry, prose and drama. The strongest answers recognise that such careful choices are not the reserve of poets and it is just as important to look closely at the writing of short stories, novels and plays. It is also crucial to show how such choices of language and the use of methods convey the developing meaning of the text; focusing on words, phrases or images abstracted from their context has little value.

It was noted during this series that a number of candidates had relied very heavily for their understanding and interpretation, particularly of poems, on a few internet sources and had taken those opinions as definitive judgements. This led to some narrow and skewed readings, where candidates would have been better advised to look carefully at the texts themselves and consider their own responses.

Comments on specific questions

1. Robert Frost: *Selected Poems*

- (a)** There were very few responses to this question. Candidates attempting it chose appropriate poems, usually two from '*The Wood-Pile*', '*Stopping by Woods*' and '*Birches*'. Less successful answers gave summary accounts of the chosen poems, while better essays considered how Frost uses and presents the season of winter in order to consider the effects of his writing. This was only possible if the poems were known in some detail.
- (b)** More candidates tackled the extract from '*The Ax-Helve*' and there were some very detailed and thoughtful responses, looking closely at how Frost reveals the xenophobic suspicion of his narrator, from the initial linking of Baptiste with an 'interfering' branch, through the use of the verb 'stole', to the expectation that he has come to say something unwelcome. Some saw the phonetic accented English to express Baptiste's lines as a means of mocking him, while others noted that the narrator's immediate judgement is that he has come to sell a helve, rather than it being a neighbourly gesture. Some strong responses looked in detail at the rhythms of the lines and phrasing, noting that they are mimetic of the movement at the point where Baptiste holds the axe before taking it. The lines depicting Baptiste's expertise were noted, as well as the narrator's

reluctance to admit it – ‘what was that to him?’ Answers like these showed how much can be gleaned from a careful analytical reading of Frost’s writing and how much is missed by simply narrative responses.

2. Elizabeth Jennings: *Selected Poems*

- (a) Too few responses to make a general comment appropriate.
- (b) Few candidates answered on Jennings’ poetry and many of the responses to this question gave a narrative account of the poem, asserting that the speaker is afraid. There were not many careful analyses of the ways in which Jennings portrays that fear poetically. More confident candidates noted the unusually short lines at the beginning and end of the first stanza and the end of the second, breaking thoughts into staccato phrases and creating a sense of incoherence, while the whole poem is held together by enjambment, even between stanzas. Some suggested the structure creates a sense of the narrator trying to cope by separating body, mind and nerves into compartments, using the metaphor of ‘a tidy home’, before that fails and the longer lines of the second two stanzas mark the surrender ‘To fear’, with that phrase emphasised by its isolation at the beginning of the final stanza. Many essays commented on the phrasing of the final line, highlighting ‘Terror’ and ‘oblivion’ before the focus on the aggressive needle.

3. *Songs of Ourselves, Volume 2*

- (a) There were surprisingly few responses to this question, but candidates opting for it chose to focus on such poems as ‘Soldier, Rest!’, ‘I Dream of You’, ‘This is My Play’s Last Scene’, ‘Death’, ‘Requiem’ and ‘Last Lines’. The most successful responses were based on poems with a clear difference of form, attitude or tone, enabling candidates to construct a clear argument in comparing them, while less confident essays relied on narrative accounts of the content of the selected poems.
- (b) Far more candidates chose to write about Rumens’ ‘The Border Builder’, focusing often on the poem’s aggressive questions. While a few candidates believed the poem to be a narration of an actual assault at a border crossing, far more were responsive to the ways in which Rumens creates a metaphoric encounter to explore questions of territory and division. The nameless authoritarian ‘he’ was often in focus, with the aggressive brevity of his questions and the use of ‘slammed’ for the passport, while the adverb ‘Merrily’ is used for his unrolling of wire, probably barbed, for the border. Many candidates referred to contemporary contexts of migration and refugees, which was helpful when closely linked to the expression of ideas in the poem; with many seeing the poem as condemnatory of the aggressive insistence of the sanctity of borders in many places across the world.

4. Jhumpa Lahiri: *The Namesake*

- (a) Maxine was a character who candidates knew well, which led to many accurate accounts of what she does in the novel and of her relationship with Gogol. Many were less certain, though, of how Lahiri presents Maxine, which was the core of the question. There were, though, some strong and detailed essays which looked at how Lahiri shapes the reader’s experience of Maxine, by looking at the impact she makes on her first appearance and how the novel defines her by the architecture of her parent’s house and the portrayal of her parents and their lifestyle, an enormous contrast in the novel with Gogol’s parents and way of life. There were interesting arguments that her character allows Gogol stability and happiness but also represents the apotheosis of his flight from his Bengali background. Many noted that although Lahiri presents Maxine as open-minded, generous and accepting of Gogol’s heritage, winning over his parents, for example; it is her lack of comprehension of his mourning his father in a manner true to his culture which eventually drives them apart.
- (b) Examiners saw a number of narrative accounts of the passage which summarised the details of the couple’s early married life without comment on either it or the way it is presented by Lahiri. Some of those who looked more closely offered a highly critical view of Gogol and Moushumi; suggesting that they are childish and trivial and unsuited to marriage. More persuasive and thoughtful responses took note of the details provided by Lahiri which indicate their shared sense of adventure and novelty in their marriage. There were interesting comments on the language of affluence and quality used in the description of the apartment, which they fill with fashionable but cheap items from Ikea. Their adventures continue into experimentations with cooking, while Lahiri

characteristically uses food choices to indicate cultural values, here embracing ‘martinis’, ‘salami and cheese’ and making ‘Indian food infrequently’, but also indulging in ‘tandoori chicken and pakoras and kabobs’ for the occasional Sunday brunch. There were some observant comments which suggested that even at this stage, Lahiri includes a few hints about the future: there is a focus on what belongs to Moushumi separately with repeated use of the possessive pronoun ‘her’; the Juliet balcony may suggest that Moushumi is still looking for romance despite being married; the lack of consideration of children may indicate a limitation to the couple’s future; and there were several comments on the ominousness of the final image of the extract, the ‘pillow pressed over her head.’

5. Edith Wharton: *The House of Mirth*

- (a) The importance of money in the novel was well understood and the most successful answers to the question looked closely at the wording, considering ways in which the issue is explored by Wharton’s writing. Such answers focused on Wharton’s portrayal of Lily’s repeated attempts to marry a wealthy man, her dependence of other women of wealth and social status and her limited inheritance from her aunt. While candidates were able to show that wealth is importance to gain access to the highest levels of society, they were able to point out that Simon Rosedale struggles to gain that access despite his wealth, while Selden operates on the periphery of it without wealth. Gerty Farish was often used as a foil, demonstrative of Wharton’s consideration that it is possible to live a good life without either full access to society or wealth.
- (b) Though sometimes candidates found it difficult to put this passage into context, it provided opportunities for exploration of the women’s relationship presented in the passage for those who looked carefully at the narration and the broken dialogue. In discussion of the presentation of Gerty, observant candidates noted the strength of the word ‘revulsion’, combined with ‘shrank back’ before her ‘compassionate instincts... swept aside all her reluctances.’ It was noted that at the end of the passage, Gerty ‘knelt’ at Lily’s side with ‘patience’, and in these ways, Wharton creates a truly empathetic and considerate character, a direct contrast with the other women around Lily. Successfully directed essays also looked closely at Lily’s speeches in contrast to Gerty’s patience, noting that no question is answered and nothing explained, while her dialogue is broken by dashes and ellipses suggesting incoherence of thought. Her distress becomes very apparent in her reference to ‘the Furies’ and in her ‘straying hands’, while her final speeches of self-deprecation show how far she has sunk.

6. Stories of Ourselves

- (a) The few responses to this question considered such stories as Lim’s ‘Journey’, ‘The Yellow Wall Paper’, ‘The Signalman’, ‘Games at Twilight’ and ‘The Lemon Orchard.’ There were often solid accounts of what made characters fearful, but there was less success with discussion of how the writers of the stories present that fear to the reader. Candidates often missed opportunities to look more closely at how settings are created, moods evoked and how the writers’ choices of language and structure communicate the characters’ emotions.
- (b) There were some thoughtful responses to the extract from ‘Journey’, with appreciation of the way Grace creates the old man’s perspective and voice. There was comment on his cultural knowledge of the environment and weather, framed in Maori terms, opposed to the ‘television’, showing he is connected to and understands the environment, whereas the world around him relies on technology. His repeated reference to ‘Funny people’ who have different values suggest his scorn for them in a gentle way while his knowledge of where ‘old roads had been’ shows his knowledge and memories which are not valued by society. Even the old man’s difficulty in recalling the ‘right words’ for a ‘lunatic asylum’ suggest that he is out of touch with new, politically correct terminology. The repetition of the words ‘houses’ in the final paragraph of the extract, candidates noted, prefigures the central concern of the story and his meeting with the planning department to which he is travelling.

7. Wole Soyinka: *Death and the King’s Horseman*

- (a) Responses to this question considered the importance of death rituals in the play, usually by focusing on the cultural requirement for Elesin, as the King’s Horseman, to kill himself. The significance of the ritual for the Yoruba people was generally understood, but candidates tended to be less successful in their examination of Soyinka’s dramatic presentation of the rituals. Those essays which showed a more secure focus on the question looked at the playwright’s use of

traditional costume, song and dance in the play, and particularly the roles of Elesin and the Praise Singer. There was also some discussion of the role of Iyaloja and the other women and some perceptive comments on the Pilkings' thoughtless misuse of the *egungun* costumes for their party, showing how the colonialists have no understanding or respect for indigenous rituals. Candidates also recognised that although it happens off stage, Olunde's suicide, with the shock revelation of his body, demonstrates the importance of the rituals to the Yoruban community.

- (b) Candidates responding to the passage recognised that Olunde has returned from England and that Jane Pilkings, as Olunde himself puts it, is 'somewhat more understanding' than her husband. A few answers noted the significance of the timing of Olunde's unexpected arrival. While the dialogue about the war and the captain's sacrifice on the ship was sometimes mentioned, very few answers recognised Soyinka's ironic parallel between the captain and Elesin, both sacrificing themselves for their community, and there was little commentary about the savagery of the war in Europe while the colonisers attempt to bring 'civilised' values to Africa.

8. William Shakespeare: *Henry IV Part 2*

- (a) There were no responses to this question.
- (b) There were no responses to this question.

9. Brian Friel: *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*

- (a) The few answers on Madge noted her motherly role towards Gar, as well as her functional role as housekeeper to S.B.. There were some references to the jokes and humour Gar uses to communicate with Madge and some answers recognised that Friel uses her character to show Gar's more emotional side. Really successful answers need a detailed knowledge of the play, so that they are supported by close reference and quotation.
- (b) Most responses to this question gave an account of the dialogue between Public and Private Gar, with some assertions about his feelings. Few answers, though, looked at the extract in detail to examine ways in which Friel communicates those feelings through the exchange of dialogue. Successful responses needed to note the balance between pathos and Gar's determination to make the best of his trip to America. This first speech about 'images and impressions' that make him 'bloody miserable' was important here, together with the crisp instructions which follow: 'Back to the job! Keep occupied!' The role-play of arrival and immigration check could be compared with other moments of similar role-play within the drama as Gar enacts his potential future, often as fantasy. In this one, Aunt Lizzy's letter and Private's interjections confirm the details of Gar's journey but also provide a humour which distracts from the regrets and pathos at the extract's opening.