

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

<p>Paper 9695/11 Drama and Poetry</p>

Key messages

- 1 Learners should move beyond ‘feature spotting’ in their essays in order to develop more precise analysis.
- 2 The genre of any given text is an important starting point for any interpretations offered by the learners.

General comments

There were responses seen at every level of assessment on all but a very few questions. The vast majority of learners had at least a straightforward knowledge of their chosen texts on which to build their responses, with some confidence in selecting material with which to address the tasks. There were very few rubric errors in this session and very few learners appeared to have misjudged the timing of their essays. The most popular texts were Tennessee Williams’s *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* in **Section A: Drama**, *Songs of Ourselves, Volume 2* in **Section B: Poetry** and Ian McEwan’s *Atonement* in **Section C: Prose**. The quality of the expression was generally appropriate to the task, though some learners were at times disadvantaged by a lack of clarity in their writing. While stronger responses used literary terms effectively and wrote in an appropriate register, there were examples of colloquial language such as ‘Armitage kind of makes it seem like this dude is not scared of anything.’

There are two specific issues to be addressed this session:

- (1) There were a number of learners who chose passage questions and adopted a quite restrictive approach to their given task. Often using apt literary terminology, these responses became a list of features, almost from the start of the essay, stating that ‘x’ was an asyndeton and ‘y’ was personification, for example. However, the ways in which the writer’s choices added to the meaning of the text and the effects created by these choices were often ignored, so that these essays became assertive and often not clearly addressing the question. Analysis at this level should be informed by an overview of the meaning of the text or passage so that the significance of the writer’s choices can be integrated into a wider discussion of the specific topic given in the question.
- (2) Many learners, when discussing their texts, ignore its specific genre as a play, a poem, a novel or story, perhaps in their haste to discuss language and imagery, for example. An appreciation of some of the generic qualities of a text, however, can be very helpful in supporting a focus on key elements, which will nearly always be relevant and should shape their discussions. In drama, this might be the interaction of audience and actors, in poetry, it might be the particular poetic form and in prose, the narrative voice. Asking themselves a question such as ‘why did the writer choose this specific interaction (an aside for example) at this point in the play’, would lead some learners to a more directed analysis and a more relevant interpretation of other literary features. The basic components of the genre of the text should be an essential consideration in the learner’s interpretation of any text or passage, perhaps even before the more precise analysis of language, for example, is undertaken.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Drama

Question 1

THOMAS MIDDLETON and WILLIAM ROWLEY: *The Changeling*

There were too few responses to either question to be able to make a general comment on performance.

Question 2

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Measure for Measure*

This was the second most popular text in the drama section, with most learners choosing the **(b)** passage question.

- (a)** There were only a few essays seen on this question. Weaker responses retold more or less relevant parts of the play, often focusing on the Duke and his 'various plans to deceive everybody else in the play', as one learner suggested. His disguise, the bed trick and the head swap were often discussed, with better answers exploring 'the moral ambiguities these stratagems created', as one learner described it. More competent answers explored different types of deception, with some good points made about 'self-deception, which is the key to understanding Angelo, Isabella and the Duke'. More successful answers supported such arguments with specific reference to the text, which enabled some learners to consider Shakespeare's methods in detail. Angelo's soliloquies were well analysed in some very good answers, for example, noting 'how Shakespeare signals his corruption through his misuse of religious symbolism and legal cant', as one expressed it. Other good essays saw religion as a tool for deception in the play generally, 'starting with the Duke dressed as a friar, and leading to Angelo's false assumption of a moral high-ground and Isabella's self-virtue which fails to protect Mariana,' as one essay argued. Where such arguments were supported by analysis and some awareness of relevant contexts, the answers did very well.
- (b)** Successful responses to this question always had a good knowledge of the appropriate context, in terms of the wider text and in terms of the characterisation of Isabella and Claudio at this point in the play. Weaker answers retold the story of their relationship, with some very weak answers unaware that Isabella was Claudio's sister and assuming she was his pregnant fiancée, severely limiting the relevance of any commentary offered. Better answers at this level were aware of the situation, including Isabella's moral dilemma and often had sufficient understanding to see how the characters develop in this exchange. More competent answers noted how similar they are. For example, how 'both of them change their opinions in a short space of time', with others noting that 'Claudio's willingness to sacrifice her virginity is not that far removed from her willingness to use Mariana's in the same way.' Good answers considered the methods closely, with many noting Claudio's use of 'graphic and horrifying imagery to reveal his fear of dying', and Isabella's 'use of religious language to give her refusal a moral high ground'. Other good answers analysed the effects of her 'almost immediately lapsing into the language of sexual deviancy, even about her own father', linking it to her similar responses to Angelo's immoral proposal. Very good answers were able to explore details tellingly, with some learners remembering, for example, that 'the disguised Duke is secretly listening to their conversation', which, for some learners, leads to his later proposal 'now that he is sure of her virtue', as one answer argued. Others saw how this exchange might have influenced Isabella's attitude to Mariana later, 'a sort of moral slipperiness that unites the siblings' as one put it, while others noted that this was 'Claudio's last meaningful appearance until his surprise (for Isabella) rebirth in the final scene', and explored his characterisation in that light. Where such arguments were supported by detailed reference to the passage and the wider text, with some awareness of appropriate contexts, such as attitudes to nuns and to premarital sex, the answers often did very well.

Question 3

WOLE SOYINKA: *The Trials of Brother Jero and Jero's Metamorphosis*

This was not a popular choice of text, with only a few essays on the **(b)** question.

- (a)** There were too few responses to be able to make a general comment on performance.
- (b)** There were only a few answers seen to this question, with weaker answers unsure of the context and only able to offer a general paraphrase of the passage, with some broad references to the wider text. Better answers had clear knowledge of why Chume is so enraged and why Jero is disappointed about him. The relationship between Jero and the Member was also discussed, with most answers noting how this revealed Jero's power and 'his ability to make the most of situations' to the audience. Good answers explored the dramatic qualities of the passage and the play, with some learners alive to the dramatic action, the comedy and the use of stage effects such as the mound and the lighting. Other good responses analysed how Soyinka 'sets the responses of the member and Chume to Jero against each other so the audience is acutely aware of Jero's hypocrisy and dishonesty', as one suggested. Only a few responses analysed Soyinka's use of dramatic language and movement, such as how 'the Member's awe-struck language, designed to inflate our opinion of Jero, is set against him fleeing the violent Chume in undignified haste', as one candidate suggested. Other good answers noted how Jero informs the audience of what is going to happen after the end of the play 'in a sort of choric function', as candidate said. Good answers were also comfortable in linking the events here to the wider text, in order to assess their significance to the audience. However only rarely were detailed knowledge and understanding of the play linked to knowledge of appropriate contexts, which was a limiting factor for some responses.

Question 4

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

This was the most popular text on the paper with over three quarters of the entry choosing it. The majority of learners opted for the passage **(b)** question.

- (a)** This was a popular question, with nearly every answer able to select relevant material with which to address the task. Weaker answers focused on the relationships between Brick and Skipper and Maggie, often showing straightforward knowledge in retelling their stories. Most learners considered that 'Williams shows the audience that without honesty neither friendships nor marriages can survive', as one suggested. Mendacity was a common discussion point, enabling better responses to develop arguments encompassing Brick and Big Daddy, for example. There was some blurring of friendship into a more general consideration of relationships in some weak essays, but for the most part learners showed some understanding of how 'Williams reveals that all successful relationships have to start as friendships and where they do not, such as with Gooper and Brick, there never can be any relationship', as one expressed it. Better answers developed such arguments with detailed and appropriate reference to the text, with many noting how the 'different versions of Brick's friendship with Skipper are a key factor in the development of the play's action', whilst others linked the antipathy between Gooper and Brick to 'a typical 1950s response to possible homosexuality shown by the narrowminded bigots of the McCarthy era', as one essay argued. Good answers noted the language used in these different versions, with Brick's 'outraged use of the anti-gay tropes – "something dirty" – was at odds with the sympathetic almost delicacy of Big Daddy's response', as one learner noted. This was extended into considering how Brick's language and actions differed when confronted by Maggie ('violent and provocative') and with Big Daddy ('outraged at first and then defensive'). Such analysis, where supported by detailed reference to the text and with appropriate awareness of contexts, often lifted the responses into the higher levels of assessment.
- (b)** This was the most popular question on the paper. Successful answers at every level had at least a sound knowledge of the textual context of the passage and were aware of the preceding conversation about Skipper, leading to Brick's decision to tell Big Daddy the truth about the cancer. This knowledge enabled learners to explore the significance of this passage with better understanding. Weaker answers tended to retell the history of the relationship and what happens to Big Daddy with only basic reference to the given passage. Better answers at this level were aware of Big Daddy's 'joy at his positive diagnosis', and how that 'freed him up to finally take notice of the

state his favourite son had gotten into', as one noted. Some weaker responses were confused about the stage directions, referring to 'readers' and unaware of their actual role in shaping a dramatic performance. Other more competent responses noticed, for example, how in the exchange, 'Williams shows us Big Daddy trying to reassert control over his son, by tenderness, physical threats and emotional pressure', as one essay suggested. Other competent answers noticed his concern for his son, 'perhaps his one redeeming feature', according to one, 'given his attitudes to Big Mama and Gooper'. Good answers developed such ideas by exploring Williams's use of dramatic methods, for example the stage directions, the setting and stage props such as the crutch and the drinks. Where this developed into analysis of the effects of these methods, as well as the use of language, the answers did very well, with some noting for example how 'the use of dashes to indicate interruptions and pauses and even emotions enables Williams to orchestrate the audience's response'. Very good answers were aware of how this exchange develops, seeing the 'hints of the later brutality from Brick in some of his language here: 'painful', 'nowhere' and even 'mechanical', as one noted. Answers at this level often supported points with appropriate contextual references, with Williams's own relationship with his father and contemporary attitudes to parenting and father/son relationships featuring frequently.

Section B: Poetry

Question 5

SIMON ARMITAGE: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

This was a popular text in **Section B** with over half of the entry choosing it, quite evenly split across the two options.

- (a) Nearly every learner was able to select relevant material from the text with which to address the task, showing at least a basic knowledge and understanding of the poem. Success in the lower levels of assessment was determined by how well the selections were shaped to the specific demands of the question. Weaker answers tended to summarise the entire plot of the poem, with only occasional references to 'desire and its effects'. Better answers at this level were able to shape their narrative summaries so that often there was at least an implicit contrast made between the various characters. More competent responses tended to consider each character in the poem in turn, discussing the particular desires of that character and, in the more successful essays, what the effects of those desires were. Sir Gawain was a popular focus of attention, with many learners noting how 'his desires change throughout the poem, from seeking honour and glory to a more mundane desire to stay alive by the end', as one essay expressed it. Other sound essays argued for different kinds of desire. For example 'the host's wife on the surface desires Sir Gawain as a lover, but in reality we learn that she really desires to test his loyalty and courtesy as a knight', whereas for other learners 'the Lord Bertilak's desire to impress Sir Gawain is clear from his pride in his hunting spoils, even though he also desires, as the Green Knight, to overcome him in battle'. Good answers supported such arguments with close reference to the text and this led naturally to some analysis of Armitage's methods. Essays at this level often had perceptive readings of the effects of, for example, 'the wife's use of seductive language and actions to hint at her desires, all the more suggestive because the object of her desire, Sir Gawain, is naked in bed and trying to maintain his virtue with his careful choice of knightly words', as one expressed it. Such analytical comments were often supported by precise references to the text and covered a range of methods, from language and imagery to exploring the dramatic qualities of actions and setting. Very good answers developed their interpretations by exploring the effects of desire in terms of characterisation and tone, but also the effects of Armitage's methods in terms of the reader's response. Where such essays also included reference to appropriate contexts, most notably the chivalric code and attitudes to honour, they invariably did very well.
- (b) Nearly every learner was able to respond relevantly to Armitage's presentation of the Green Knight in the given passage and the majority of responses were aware of the context of the passage: 'Arthur's court enjoying a typical medieval Christmas feast', as one put it. Weaker answers however tended to retell the story of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, often in knowledgeable detail, but with too little focus on the details of the passage. Better answers at this level did discuss the Green Knight, often using details from the passage to offer opinions about his role and characterisation more generally in the text. Nearly every answer at least considered the implications of his colour, variously a symbol for magic, nature, violence and supernatural powers. Better answers explored Armitage's use of 'detailed description, from the sprig of holly to the forest-green buttons', as one learner suggested. Other sound answers discussed how Armitage creates 'a dramatic impression

of the Green Knight's size and his impact on the feasting courtiers', as one said, with some candidates seeing him as terrifying, intimidating or, for some, slightly comic, 'almost like a monster out of a modern Marvel film', as one learner noted. Good answers developed such interpretations by exploring more of the detail – Armitage's use of language and alliteration were often well analysed – and at this level there was a good understanding of 'the suspense and anticipation created in the courtiers and the readers of the poem', as one learner suggested. Very good answers analysed the effects of Armitage's choices well, noting, for example, how the confidence of the Green Knight is reflected in his language and demeanour, 'but is intriguing and threatening at the same time'. Answers at this level explored the style closely, including the effects of the 'bob and wheel', and the use of first person in both narration and through the Green Knight himself to 'create an immediacy of effect in the reader and to connect readers directly to the events of the poem', as one noted. Where such arguments evaluated the significance of this passage by precise reference to the wider text and were supported by appropriate contextual references, the essays did very well.

Question 6

ROBERT BROWNING: Selected Poems

This was a minority choice of text in this session, with most learners choosing the **(b)** passage question.

- (a)** There were only a very few essays seen on this question. Most learners were able to select two relevant poems with which to address the task, with popular choices being *My Last Duchess*, *The Laboratory* and *Porphyria's Lover*. Weaker answers paraphrased the events in their chosen poems, with success at this level reflecting how well the discussion was shaped to the task. More competent answers chose contrasting poems to discuss, thereby embedding at least an implicit awareness of the range of ways in which Browning used and portrayed violence. The way the monk in *Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister* reveals his unfounded anger in minor acts of violence, for example, was well contrasted with the jealous rage of the lover in *Porphyria's Lover* and her subsequent murder. Learners noted how a variety of human emotions might lead to different kinds of violence. 'Love, hatred, envy, jealousy and even religious zeal could all lead to somebody's death', as one noted. Others discussed how Browning 'often focuses on the warped and unhinged mentality of those who are violent, often against innocent victims such as Brother Lawrence, Porphyria or the Duchess', as one good essay argued. Such arguments were often supported by detailed reference to the poems and with good awareness of Browning's methods, especially his use of 'the dramatic monologue and dark, sinister language which gives the reader clear insights into violent passions that lead to the acts of violence'. Other good essays considered his use of verse form, imagery and rhyme, often choosing appropriately contrasting poems to illustrate their arguments effectively. Very good answers developed such insights with appropriate quotations and a perceptive grasp of the effects of Browning's choices, with some contrasting a Victorian reader's possible responses to those of a more modern reader. This enabled some learners to integrate contextual references seamlessly into their interpretations, notably on Victorian attitudes to women and sex. Such essays invariably did very well.
- (b)** Weaker answers on this poem tended to be insecure in basic knowledge of the poem's meaning, often confusing the friend and the speaker's actual situation with the woman. Better answers at this level were able to offer a mostly accurate paraphrase, with some shaping of the commentary to the specifics of the task. Many were aware of the 'arrogance of the speaker and his derogatory attitude to the woman and his friend', as one learner suggested. Other responses concentrated more on the 'differing attitudes the men had to the woman', with the 'friend's passion contrasting the speaker's diffidence,' as one argued. Her role in causing the split between the friends was well discussed and for some 'her silence was symbolic of Victorian attitudes to women generally', as one essay argued, with others noting that 'she was adored as well as exploited by the men in her life'. Competent answers explored Browning's use of narrative perspectives, from 'the speaker evidently talking to someone not connected, the friend's anguish and the woman's silence all leading to the rather teasing reference to Browning himself, as a dramatist,' as one summarised it. Good answers also considered the language carefully, the speaker's contrasting of the eagle and the wren for example and the comparison of the woman to a pear ripe for plucking. This again led good responses into considering appropriate contexts, such as changing attitudes to women and to friendship. Some good essays did consider Browning's use of dramatic monologue here with some perceptive analysis of its effects. Few essays however looked closely at Browning's use of verse form or the more immediate poetic methods such as rhythm and rhyme, which limited the overall effectiveness of the analyses offered.

Question 7

GILLIAN CLARKE: Selected Poems

This was a minority choice overall, with more or less all of the learners choosing the **(b)** passage option.

- (a) There were too few responses to be able to make a general comment on performance on this question.
- (b) This was a minority choice, with some very weak answers responding as to an unseen poem, with only a very general grasp of the poem's meaning and concerns. Better answers at this level were able to offer a basic paraphrase of the poem, with some understanding of Clarke's concerns: nature, 'her delight in simple things such as cooking apples', Wales and life in the countryside. More competent answers noticed her use of the first person, 'which gives the reader an insight into the speaker's emotions', as one learner suggested. Other sound answers noted her use of 'sensual language and imagery as though she is talking about a lover', whereas others discussed the 'more sinister undertones of violence in her language'. Good answers developed such insights into considering the effects of her choices, such as the use of free verse, the structure of the contrasting stanzas, her use of time and for nearly all learners at this level her 'total immersion into the traditions of the countryside, through her references to the "original sin" and the symbol of apples with worms at their heart', as one essay expressed it. Very good answers analysed the literary features in depth, for example, 'the contrasting use of first and third person pronouns to create a sort of conflict in the reader's mind', as one suggested. Where such interpretations were supported by appropriate quotation and some awareness of relevant contexts the answers did very well.

Question 8

Songs of Ourselves, Volume 2

This was the most popular **Section B** text, though the vast majority of learners chose the passage **(b)** option.

- (a) There were too few responses to be able to make a general comment on performance on this question.
- (b) This was a popular question with approximately a quarter of the entry choosing it. Weaker answers, generally aware of the dialogue as a structuring device, were however often confused with some of Herbert's symbolism, 'dust and sin' and the 'unworthy guest', for example. At this level, not many identified the religious meaning of the poem, suggesting a less than assured understanding of the poem in general. More competent answers were able to follow the dialogue as 'Love tries different ways to comfort the speaker' and were often aware of the significance of some of the symbolism: 'Sit and eat' was recognised as 'symbolic of God's love, perhaps symbolising communion itself', as one suggested. Good answers were able to explore some of Herbert's methods beyond the religious symbolism. His use of dialogue, first person narrative and rhyme was well analysed, with some very good answers able to comment on poetic form: 'the poem is perfectly symmetrical, perhaps mirroring God's inherent omnipotence and perfection', as one learner suggested. Very good answers were also able to explore the 'overarching metaphor of the speaker being a guest and Love being the host', as one summarised it, 'appropriately symbolising the relationship between the doubting believer and God, as one where the believer is always made welcome'. There were few successful attempts to contextualise the poem, with only a very few learners aware of Herbert's biography and this for other learners was a limitation on the depth and pertinence of their interpretations.

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Key messages

- 1 Learners should move beyond ‘feature spotting’ in their essays in order to develop more precise analysis.
- 2 The genre of any given text is an important starting point for any interpretations offered by the learners.

General comments

There were responses seen at every level of assessment on all but a very few questions. The vast majority of learners had at least a straightforward knowledge of their chosen texts on which to build their responses, with some confidence in selecting material with which to address the tasks. There were very few rubric errors in this session and very few learners appeared to have misjudged the timing of their essays. The most popular texts were Tennessee Williams’s *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* in **Section A: Drama**, *Songs of Ourselves, Volume 2* in **Section B: Poetry** and Ian McEwan’s *Atonement* in **Section C: Prose**. The quality of the expression was generally appropriate to the task, though some learners were at times disadvantaged by a lack of clarity in their writing. While stronger responses used literary terms effectively and wrote in an appropriate register, there were examples of colloquial language such as ‘Armitage kind of makes it seem like this dude is not scared of anything.’

There are two specific issues to be addressed this session:

- (1) There were a number of learners who chose passage questions and adopted a quite restrictive approach to their given task. Often using apt literary terminology, these responses became a list of features, almost from the start of the essay, stating that ‘x’ was an asyndeton and ‘y’ was personification, for example. However, the ways in which the writer’s choices added to the meaning of the text and the effects created by these choices were often ignored, so that these essays became assertive and often not clearly addressing the question. Analysis at this level should be informed by an overview of the meaning of the text or passage so that the significance of the writer’s choices can be integrated into a wider discussion of the specific topic given in the question.
- (2) Many learners, when discussing their texts, ignore its specific genre as a play, a poem, a novel or story, perhaps in their haste to discuss language and imagery, for example. An appreciation of some of the generic qualities of a text, however, can be very helpful in supporting a focus on key elements, which will nearly always be relevant and should shape their discussions. In drama, this might be the interaction of audience and actors, in poetry, it might be the particular poetic form and in prose, the narrative voice. Asking themselves a question such as ‘why did the writer choose this specific interaction (an aside for example) at this point in the play’, would lead some learners to a more directed analysis and a more relevant interpretation of other literary features. The basic components of the genre of the text should be an essential consideration in the learner’s interpretation of any text or passage, perhaps even before the more precise analysis of language, for example, is undertaken.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Drama

Question 1

THOMAS MIDDLETON and WILLIAM ROWLEY: *The Changeling*

There were only few responses to this text with about an even split between the two options.

- (a) Nearly all of the few answers seen were able to select relevant material with which to address the task. Weaker answers retold De Flores's story in the play with little or no reference to the given quotation. Better answers at this level were able to shape their ideas more relevantly. More competent answers did have opinions and arguments on his characterisation. De Flores was viewed 'to be both pretentious and inward looking, only thinking of his own needs whilst being condescending in relation to the needs of others', as one suggested. Other responses considered him in terms of his relationship with Beatrice, with most learners agreeing that 'they are equally self-absorbed and self-centred', with 'by the end a sexual obsession that excludes other considerations such as family loyalty', as one learner argued. Better answers looked at methods, with most learners noting that, 'His constant references to himself and the constant use of 'I' and "myself" represent his selfish nature.' For some, his 'love or obsession with Beatrice made him certainly equal to Piracquo and Alsemero', was a mitigating factor, though he was also viewed as 'self-pitying and unable to accept the consequences of his own actions' by others. Where these arguments were supported by close reference to the text the answers did well.
- (b) This was the slightly less popular choice. Learners who knew the play well and could place the passage accurately in its context were at an advantage. Weaker answers tended to summarise the relationship generally, often with only brief reference to the given passage. Slightly better answers were able to consider the significance of this exchange, 'the first time that they meet in secret', as the starting point for the 'deception and intrigue that leads to rape and murder', as one explained it. Sound answers saw their contrasting attitudes to Piracquo – 'Alsemero immediately thinking of the honourable challenge and duel, Beatrice of subterfuge and murder', as one suggested. However, some learners also noted that 'Beatrice has a much sharper understanding of the consequences of Alsemero's challenge', and her 'female wisdom sees the dangers in Alsemero's approach'. Good essays explored how the dramatists presented their attraction to each other, 'using religious language and imagery and dramatic action in the kiss', as one essay stated. Alsemero's 'honesty' of approach and her eventual deceit of him as well as Piracquo were analysed well at this level, 'her mention of "fouler visage" immediately bringing De Flores to her mind and setting her on her self-destructive course', as one essay argued. Her attitudes to Alsemero – 'too good to risk in a fight' – were contrasted to her 'utterly repulsive attitude to De Flores at this point, his "ugliness" making him best suited to her dirty work', as one learner expressed it. Her realisation of De Flores's potential usefulness and 'how she can abuse and manipulate his obsession with her is what sets the "plot" in motion', as one noted, though others added 'she however is not so sharp on the consequences of using De Flores's desire for her, at least until it is too late'. Where such arguments were supported by relevant quotation from the passage and supporting references to the wider text the answers did well.

Question 2

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Measure for Measure*

This was a popular drama text on the paper, with over a quarter of the entry choosing it, the (a) option being the most popular choice.

- (a) Nearly every answer was able to choose relevant material with which to address the task. Weaker answers tended to summarise more or less relevant relationships, with the main focus on Angelo and Isabella, often in more successful answers at this level, contrasting his attitude to her with the attitudes of the Duke and her brother. She was generally seen as 'undervalued by all men' or 'objectified, used and abused', with always a 'lack of the respect due to her status as a nun'. More competent answers also had a general consensus that 'men did not treat women well', although one or two praised 'the Duke for providing a satisfactory outcome for the wronged women'. It was also observed that Claudio was respectful to Juliet and contrasted with the young men who frequented the brothels. In some sound essays there was general condemnation of the hypocrisy

of the men who spoke disparagingly of the women in the brothels but were quite happy to use their services. Angelo, a hypocrite, and the Duke, 'a controlling manipulator of women', however, came in for the most criticism. Some good essays also questioned the 'happy' ending, with marriage not being seen as 'a solution for the women and regarded as a punishment for the men', as one essay argued. Good essays often developed interesting arguments on the morality and 'the politics of the play which underpin the presentation of women in *Measure for Measure*', enjoying, it would seem, debating the different attitudes to gender and sexuality which they saw as interesting from a modern viewpoint. This was an obvious and engaging way into the texts for many good candidates. The best answers embraced the complete social context of the play in its presentation of a domineering and abusive patriarchy and there were some well-argued and incisive discussions of hypocrisy, concealing the social control and objectification of women. These essays, for example analysed the language used by the men – 'virgin', 'maid', 'widow', 'wife', 'punk' and 'whore' - noting how the 'female roles were thus determined from the outset in terms of how they responded to men'. Where such arguments were supported by precise reference to the text and appropriate contexts the answers did very well.

- (b) Learners with an appropriately detailed grasp of the context for this passage were at an advantage in considering how an audience might respond. Nearly every answer recognised this as the 'revelation scene, when justice is served', as one essay described it. Many thought the 'audience will be anticipating justice on Angelo in particular but also on Lucio'. There were occasional misunderstandings in some weaker answers, some candidates assuming that Isabella was obliged to marry the Duke, though others, with more understanding at this level, felt that 'Shakespeare had deliberately made the ending ambiguous' and 'the audience would hope that she would refuse'. The final components of Angelo's role were at times considered inaccurately: for example, Angelo's embracing of the justice of his own execution was sometimes read as if it came *after* the Duke's 'instruction for him to marry Mariana, and he was trying to escape it'. More competent answers had a clear sense of the context: 'This extract, which takes place in the denouement of the play features climatic moments where justice is served as the Duke's disguise is revealed and the reality of Angelo's appearances and deceptions are unravelled publicly', as one learner summarised it. At this level too there was a sound grasp of the dramatic irony throughout the passage, with some noticing the rising tension when the friar is arrested. Good answers also were often able to explore the comedy of the moment when it is Lucio who reveals him. Another feature of stronger responses was the sense of theatre at this moment, 'the snatching of the Friar's hood is a theatrical representation of truth revealed', as one learner suggested. Some good answers, though, found it 'unconvincing that the Duke drags it out so long when he could reveal himself', with one suggesting that 'Shakespeare was working for a big climax but it is not really credible in the end'. One very good answer neatly summarised these opposing views: 'The dramatic tension rising, as lives hang in the balance, is mixed with the comedic irony of the situation.' Other very good answers noted that 'the Duke's decision to remit Lucio's 'other forfeits' shows the characteristic mercy of the resolution'. Some stronger responses focused on 'the restoration of order provided by the Duke's reappearance' and how 'marriage is used as a generic convention to re-establish both the moral order and social hierarchy'. There was also some very good analysis of the dramatic ironies on display: 'The unravelling of the truth that is already known to the audience is a climactic moment for both the characters and the audience.' At this level there was some very good analysis of the drama, for example 'the spectacle of the prostration of Isabella and Mariana to beg for Angelo's life, engineered as it is by a Duke who is *still* holding many significant cards close to his chest', as one put it. Where such arguments were supported by detailed reference to the passage and an awareness of appropriate contexts, the answers did very well.

Question 3

WOLE SOYINKA: *The Trials of Brother Jero and Jero's Metamorphosis*

This was a relatively popular choice in this session with the majority of responses choosing the (b) passage option.

- (a) Most essays were able to discuss some of Soyinka's choices relevantly, with many noting that 'His choice of Lagos and Nigeria enabled him to develop his satire about political corruption and religious exploitation', as one essay put it. Weaker essays summarised the events in the various settings, often at least implicitly contrasting the 'rented tumbledown shack, where Amope waits for him, with his change to a white framed office', indicating for some learners, Jero's success and growing importance. More competent responses saw the settings as symbolic – 'the beach where there are traders' and 'links to Jesus and fishermen Peter and James'. Others noted that the beach

also represented 'temptations of the flesh in form of the young woman and her transformation', though others argued: 'the Battle for the beach by the authorities for public executions changes Jero into a general and the prophets into an army'. Also symbolic for some was 'jumping out of the window like a common thief', though others explored Jero's rise in fortunes in the later description of his office and Rachel. Other essays were more discursive, considering the effects of the use of the beach at a time when there was a scarcity of land in Lagos, as well as 'the proximity to water for baptism seen in biblical stories'. Very good responses analysed the more humorous scenes at the window of Jero's house and some of the 'slapstick humour of the chases and religious meetings in unlikely places', as one noted. Very good answers also discussed the satire that 'Soyinka gets from the setting of "the church", a place where good should be represented, yet many aspects of hypocrisy and wrongdoings are revealed there instead', as one argued. Where these insights were supported by appropriate references to the text and some awareness of context, the answers were very successful.

- (b) Nearly every response was able to respond relevantly to the given passage and the relationship between Jero, Chume and Amope was explored by most candidates, noting how 'Jero manipulated and lied to Chume'. This led many learners to comment on Jero as 'a false prophet preying on Chume's weaknesses to keep him compliant and giving poor advice on his marital relationship', as one essay summarised it. In some weaker answers, Jero and Chume were viewed as close friends which was why 'Chume could confide in Jero both as a friend and a priest'. More competent answers considered the relationship in a variety of ways: master/servant, labourer/overseer, prophet/follower, for example, were often mentioned. Other sound answers saw how 'Jero manipulates Chume through male stereotypes – violence, misogyny, husband and nagging wife.' Good answers developed this so that 'Chume's subservience to Jero was a comment by Soyinka on how the masses in postcolonial Nigeria had switched from one master (colonial rulers) to another - corrupt religion'. Chume's subservience was often well analysed in good answers, such as 'Jero abuses his trust and his faith, using the language of religion and prophecy to control and confuse him', as one good response expressed it. Some responses saw Jero as a positive influence, but better knowledge had others remembering 'Jero tells Chume to beat her when he finds out she is his creditor for the coat'. Very good answers saw how the 'passage is comic as well as serious', supported with analysis of the physical drama of falling to his knees and Jero's use of abstruse biblical names and the repeated Christian mantra of 'forgive him'. As one very good answer noted 'the underlying satire of a domestic squabble is punctuated by religious cant and through Soyinka's contrast of pidgin English and literate religious language'. Very good answers also made telling use of appropriate contexts and were able to place the passage in the wider text very precisely, enabling a judicious assessment of the significance of the passage to the presentation of the relationship and the play more generally.

Question 4

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

This was a popular choice in this session, with the majority of learners choosing the passage (b) question.

- (a) Just about every answer found relevant points to make about Brick and at least to a basic level had some opinions on how Williams shapes the audience's response. Weaker answers tended to summarise all they could remember about him and his relationships, especially with Maggie, Skipper and Big Daddy. Better answers at this level were often more of a psychoanalysis of Brick, and indeed Tennessee Williams himself (where contexts were added), rather than an exploration of how the response of the audience was shaped. Although the question specifically states 'an audience', weaker answers often referred to 'readers' and struggled to see Brick as a dramatic construct. There was often detailed textual knowledge and most candidates covered a range of significant points, such as homosexuality, alcoholism and marital failure.

Competent answers discussed the audience's shifting responses to Brick and how Williams manages to 'make him sympathetic while he is doing and saying unattractive things'. This was developed in good responses into discussing, for example, 'his uneasy relationship with the truth despite his disgust towards mendacity'. At this level some interpretations thought 'the audience might have a sympathetic understanding of the difficult relationships that Brick had with both Maggie and Big Daddy', as one suggested, while others focused more on 'his sense of loss and personal blame over Skipper's death'. In nearly every response Brick was seen as the central character in the play around whom the storylines of the other characters revolved. More successful responses kept the 'audience' firmly in view, with some very good answers developing

interpretations of him as a tragic figure, 'because he was the fixed point from which the others were judged, often harshly, by the audience', as one expressed it. Good answers were also aware of contexts, often Williams's own biography, but in some thoughtful responses, how 'the shift in family and sexual politics over the last 70 years means a modern audience is more sensitive to the moral pressures and family dynamics within which Williams creates his anti-hero', as one succinctly expressed it.

- (b) This was the most popular drama question on the paper. Nearly every answer found relevant material with which to address the task, though weaker answers were often more general, focusing on her role and actions in the play as a whole, with too little on the details of the passage to reach beyond the basic level of assessment. Better answers often had strong views on Big Mama's words and actions in the passage, but were divided in their opinions, with some more sympathetic than others. Details such as when she picked up the stockings were used to support both sides – some seeing it as a motherly gesture and others as demonstrating her need for control, for example. More competent answers considered Williams's presentation of her. Some learners saw her as 'more of a cartoon character', with others suggesting 'she is a stereotypical wife of the period'. More aware responses linked her with Maggie as a woman desperate for love and affection from her husband, though interesting points were made on the rivalry between Big Mama and Maggie for Brick's affection. There was much discussion of her appearance and why Williams made her 'comical and frumpy', with some good answers developing arguments around her 'contrasting physically with Maggie's evident attractiveness and sensuality', as one learner noted. This led some good responses into considering her relationship with Big Daddy and his 'revulsion revealed later to Brick', as well as contrasting this relationship with 'the current situation between Brick and Maggie'. Many responses considered her character traits in detail: the lack of privacy and her 'nosiness', insensitivity to others, favouritism for Brick, tenderness to Maggie and her evident love for Big Daddy. Better answers looked at how Williams created attitudes in the audience: 'Her exaggerations – robbers, falling to her knees, vulgarity – suggest a melodramatic character, larger than life literally and metaphorically', as one expressed it. Other good responses noted the ways in which 'Big Mama's physical presence invades and dominates the dramatic space, making Brick and Maggie feel small.' The best answers delved beneath the surface of her words and actions and discussed 'the disparity between Big Mama's external bluster and her inner fragility', as one essay expressed it. Where such arguments were supported by analysis of some of the detail of the passage, awareness of the textual context and a sensitive response to the dramatic effects, the responses invariably did very well.

Section B: Poetry

Question 5

SIMON ARMITAGE: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

This was the least popular text in **Section B** with only a very small minority of responses, evenly split across the two options.

- (a) The few responses seen to this question were nearly always able to consider some of the physical conflicts Armitage presents in the text, offering detailed summaries of Sir Gawain's two encounters with the Green Knight and, in more successful answers, of the various hunting scenes. There was also often some awareness of the context for the poem, though weaker answers were confused by the relationship between the 'original version and Armitage's translation', as one learner put it. This led to some confusions about 'the chivalric code and knightly honour' and how a modern audience might view them. More competent answers often considered the ways in which conflict tests Sir Gawain's character and integrity. There were interesting insights into the ways in which inner conflict is just or even more significant than external challenges in the poem. Nearly every response saw conflicts as a representation of 'the virtue of bravery expected of knights' and 'the idea of challenges used in jousts' as one suggested. Nearly every response saw the conflict with the Green Knight as portraying 'the honour of Gawain in being willing to accept his challenge', though his 'acceptance of the shielding girdle represents the triumph of life in the conflict between life and death', as one argued. Generally, though, 'his rejection of the potential conflict of the seductive attempts of the Green Knight's wife', was seen as 'proof of his virtue and chivalry'. In some wider ranging responses, the conflict between King Arthur and Morgan Le Fay were also discussed as a contextual support to other arguments. Successful responses were often well-prepared in terms of content and context, but less so regarding poetic method. Although some

were able to discuss Armitage's alliterative verse this was rarely integrated into the arguments and other poetic methods such as language and imagery were only rarely mentioned.

- (b) This was a marginally more popular choice on this text. Weaker answers paraphrased some parts of the passage or summarised some of the key events in Arthur's court, with only passing reference to the presentation of the Green Knight which was the focus of the question. Better answers did look at some of the details of Armitage's description with most answers identifying how 'he creates an image of a huge giant in the reader's mind', as one learner expressed it. The effect of his greenness was also discussed with many, and varied, interpretations of its symbolic importance, such as fertility, strength, evil (and goodness for some), the supernatural and natural magic. Answers at all levels did at times consider poetic methods, though weaker answers tended to 'feature spot', with limited success in analysing the effects of, for example, the language or the imagery. Good answers often noted alliteration as 'the organising principle of the verse', but were more judicious when analysing specific moments in the passage and were always focused on the effects of the description on the reader, with some noting the effects on the 'internal audience gathered in Arthur's court, as wonder and disbelief'. A few very good responses considered some of the details in more analytical depth, with one for example discussing how 'the sudden use of "I" to suggest a first-person narrator makes the passage much more immediate and creates a dramatic effect on the reader'. Where such analysis was supported by close reference to the passage, the answers did very well.

Question 6

ROBERT BROWNING: Selected Poems

This was a minority choice of text with the majority of learners responding to the passage (b) option.

- (a) Most learners were able to choose relevant poems with which to address the task. Popular choices of poems were: *My Last Duchess*, *A Woman's Last Word*, *Meeting at Night*, *A Toccata of Galuppi's*, *The Bishop Orders His Tomb at St Praxed's Church*, *Porphyria's Lover* and *Love in a Life*. Weaker answers tended to paraphrase and summarise their chosen poems, which were not always particularly relevant to the task. All answers agreed with the given statement and attempted at least in a basic way to show how the poems revealed longing, for example, 'the Bishop wanting a better tomb than his rival and the lover longing for his beloved's total devotion', as one learner suggested. Better answers at this level had detailed knowledge of the selection and were able to support their ideas with accurate references and at times quotations. More competent answers chose appropriate poems in which 'longing is central to the speaker's story', as one suggested. Careful selection helped some sound interpretations to show a range of concerns that Browning developed in this way: love and hate were popular choices, though death, youth and loyalty were often mentioned. Good answers focused as much on Browning's presentation. Many good answers showed understanding of his use of dramatic monologue, with some good analyses exploring the different ways 'longing might reveal itself, in imagery and language', as one noted. Very good answers were able to use their detailed knowledge and understanding to explore the effects of Browning's writing and 'how he puts the reader into the mind and mood of the speaker, whether a psychopathic jealous lover longing to use her poison or the aching sense of loss created by listening to melancholic music', as one essay expressed it. Answers at this level often considered rhythm and verse form in their analysis and where the arguments were supported by detailed references to the poems and some awareness of context the answers did very well.
- (b) Weaker answers at times struggled with basic knowledge and understanding of the poem, offering personally engaged but unsupported readings of the poem as, for example, 'a race to the death for a bottle of wine'. Better answers at this level were able to summarise the events accurately and at times showed awareness of how 'the way the companions fall by the wayside, the death of the horse and the vagueness of the news all help to create tension', as one summarised it. However, many answers at this level asserted it was exciting, rather than showing the poetic means through which excitement is generated. A number of responses lapsed into repetitive comments on multiple examples of excitement, rarely offering a convincing case on how Browning created the sensation. More competent responses did discuss how Browning 'uses time and progression and dynamic rhythms', with other good answers analysing the use of rhyme and traditional story telling techniques, 'such as the first-person narrator and the giving of names to places and animals'. Very good answers developed such ideas, for example, looking at how 'the personification of the sun/nature as needing to witness events creates the same effect in the reader'. Others explored the effects of the 'succession of names and places, the charging rhythm, suggesting the galloping

horses', as one learner expressed it. Some very good analyses of the effects of Browning's rhythmic patterns and the full rhymes, especially where supported by detailed reference to the poem, revealed sophisticated understanding and perceptive awareness of Browning's poetic art and were very successful.

Question 7

GILLIAN CLARKE: Selected Poems

This was a minority choice overall, with nearly every learner choosing the **(b)** passage option.

- (a)** The very few learners who tackled this question often had at least a sound knowledge of the selection and were able to choose relevant poems with which to address it. Popular choices were *February*, *Cold Knap Lake*, *Hare in July* and *Burning Nettles*. Weaker answers tended to summarise their chosen poems, with success determined by how well the supporting commentary was shaped to the task. More competent answers chose their material carefully to show the different kinds of power with which Clarke is concerned, 'from the urge to kill to the ability to soothe broken hearts and minds', as one learner put it. Good answers did look more closely at the 'writing and its effects', analysing Clarke's use of language 'sometimes sinister and at other times moving, like when the seal leaves her pup', as one learner stated. Other good responses considered imagery and personification to good effect, with some noting how 'Clarke often uses the vulnerability of humans in the natural world, such as the girl in the lake', as one essay suggested. When such interpretations were supported by specific reference to the text and some awareness of appropriate contexts, the answers did well.
- (b)** This was the more popular choice on this text. Some weaker answers were unsure about the basic meaning of the poem and often had confused understanding of some important elements, such as 'the poem is morbid as the man has made her a coffin'. Better answers at this level did understand that 'the box is an extended metaphor to explore her relationship', as one suggested. More competent answers discussed 'its strength, the hard work to build it and the memories and emotions inside it', as one essay put it. Good answers analysed the use of imagery – 'golden', 'bright key' and 'black books' were all well explored, for example and one essay explained usefully that 'sanded, oiled and planed' was not in the correct order and why that was significant to the poem's meaning. Very good answers were able to develop interpretations successfully, for example noting the 'clever synergy between the box and the poem – the box is the poem and the poem is about the box'. At this level, learners were often sensitive to the intimacy made public by the box and some viewed *The Box* as akin to the enigmatic nature of 'Pandora's Box', albeit without an evil aspect'. For others, the solidity of the 'golden oak' was considered 'to represent the solid foundation of the persona's marriage and relationship with her husband', as one essay expressed it. The four walls of the box were also seen to 'symbolise a protective barrier keeping the secrets within the twelve books contained within the box, but to be revealed to those left behind'. Where such arguments were well supported by appropriate analysis of Clarke's poetic methods and precise reference to the poem, the answers always did very well.

Question 8

Songs of Ourselves, Volume 2

This was the most popular **Section B** text, though the vast majority of learners chose the passage **(b)** option.

- (a)** There were only a few essays seen on this question. Nearly every answer showed at least a basic knowledge and understanding of the selection. Popular choices of poems were *In the Park*, *Winter Song*, *Father Returning Home* and *Growing Old*. Weaker answers at times found it difficult to shape their responses to the demands of the question, offering general summaries of poems that they knew. More competent answers were able to contrast the presentation in the two poems chosen, sometimes implicitly, but with some awareness of how poets shape meaning through their choices. For some learners '*Growing Old* emphasised the physical aspects of growing old, including loss of beauty and strength', as one summarised it. Other responses noted that in '*Father Returning Home* the divisions between generations were seen to represent the impact of aging', as well as 'the fact that we appreciate different situations differently as we age'. Good answers looked closely at poetic methods, most often language and imagery, though only rarely were the effects of these methods analysed. Only a very few learners seemed confident in analysing other poetic methods, such as form and metre, even where the poems chosen were very different in these

aspects.

- (b) This was the most popular question on the paper. Nearly every answer found some relevant points to make and had at least a basic knowledge and understanding of the poem on which to base their interpretation. Weaker answers, even with some partial understanding, often drifted into unfocused paraphrasing of the poem. There were also many straightforward responses that began reasonably but lapsed into repetition and descriptive commentary. At this level, those who kept the focus on the water tended to do better overall than those who also explored general contextual points on Dharker's mixed heritage, for example. There were some very weak responses that had gaps in their knowledge of the poem, suggesting for example that 'all the water comes from a god in a genuine miracle', as one put it. These essays seemed to be responding as to an unseen poem. More competent answers recognised that 'it's about how the Community is experiencing a shortage of water', and considered the extreme conditions. This led some into seeing the poem as a 'social commentary condemning societies which did not provide vital services for their poorest members', as one essay said, while other learners considered that 'we in richer countries take water for granted', with some good analysis of the 'municipal pipe' noted in a number of essays. The extreme conditions were well explored in good essays, citing the 'poverty shown by words such as naked, huts, tin mugs, small bones', as one essay suggested. Getting the opening image of the land splitting (rather than skin) enabled good essays to analyse the contrasts between the landscape and the appearance of the adults and children living in poverty. Other good essays were alive to the effects of the religious language and imagery – 'blessing', 'congregation', 'kindly god' often very well discussed at this level. For others the 'imagery of the utensils shows universality of the need – for rich and poor, old and young', according to one. Very good answers analysed the 'conversational tone – "imagine the drip" – her use of enjambement', which 'gave fluidity to the poem about water' and the length of the stanzas. Strong answers focused on form and structure, such as enjambment and free verse, linking these aspects to the narrative of the poem, which for many was 'the impact of poverty and the deprivation of small communities of a vital commodity such as water, as one put it. Where such arguments were linked to appropriate contexts and supported by detailed reference to the poem the answers did very well.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

<p>Paper 9695/13 Drama and Poetry</p>

Key messages

- 1 Learners should move beyond 'feature spotting' in their essays in order to develop more precise analysis.
- 2 The genre of any given text is an important starting point for any interpretations offered by the learners.

General comments

There were responses seen at every level of assessment on all but a very few questions. The vast majority of learners had at least a straightforward knowledge of their chosen texts on which to build their responses, with some confidence in selecting material with which to address the tasks. There were very few rubric errors in this session and very few learners appeared to have misjudged the timing of their essays. The most popular texts were Tennessee Williams's *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* in **Section A: Drama**, *Songs of Ourselves, Volume 2* in **Section B: Poetry** and Ian McEwan's *Atonement* in **Section C: Prose**. The quality of the expression was generally appropriate to the task, though some learners were at times disadvantaged by a lack of clarity in their writing. While stronger responses used literary terms effectively and wrote in an appropriate register, there were examples of colloquial language such as 'Armitage kind of makes it seem like this dude is not scared of anything.'

There are two specific issues to be addressed this session:

- (1) There were a number of learners who chose passage questions and adopted a quite restrictive approach to their given task. Often using apt literary terminology, these responses became a list of features, almost from the start of the essay, stating that 'x' was an asyndeton and 'y' was personification, for example. However, the ways in which the writer's choices added to the meaning of the text and the effects created by these choices were often ignored, so that these essays became assertive and often not clearly addressing the question. Analysis at this level should be informed by an overview of the meaning of the text or passage so that the significance of the writer's choices can be integrated into a wider discussion of the specific topic given in the question.
- (2) Many learners, when discussing their texts, ignore its specific genre as a play, a poem, a novel or story, perhaps in their haste to discuss language and imagery, for example. An appreciation of some of the generic qualities of a text, however, can be very helpful in supporting a focus on key elements, which will nearly always be relevant and should shape their discussions. In drama, this might be the interaction of audience and actors, in poetry, it might be the particular poetic form and in prose, the narrative voice. Asking themselves a question such as 'why did the writer choose this specific interaction (an aside for example) at this point in the play', would lead some learners to a more directed analysis and a more relevant interpretation of other literary features. The basic components of the genre of the text should be an essential consideration in the learner's interpretation of any text or passage, perhaps even before the more precise analysis of language, for example, is undertaken.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Drama

Question 1

THOMAS MIDDLETON AND WILLIAM ROWLEY: *The Changeling*

There were too few responses to this text to be able to make a general comment on performance on either option.

Question 2

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Measure for Measure*

This was the second most popular drama text on the paper, with the majority of learners choosing the **(b)** passage option.

- (a)** Nearly every answer had at least a basic knowledge and understanding of Isabella's role and character and was able to offer some personal response. Very weak answers retold as much of her story as they could with little awareness of the focus of the question. Better answers at this level shaped their chosen material to address the task in a straightforward way. Few answers were confident enough to challenge the given assertion, though some wondered if 'her view of a cloistered life might not be extreme or even masochistic'. Others thought that the Duke might be liberating her from this, but generally learners offered flat character readings at this level. More competent answers however were more varied in their opinions. Isabella's desire to be a nun was seen as surprising as 'she is presented as a strong-minded woman', though some learners thought Isabella 'represents the human tendency towards extremes – her celibacy is as impossible as Lucio's debauchery', as one learner argued. Good answers saw her decision in terms of its effects on others as well, as she is 'abused by at least 3 men, perhaps even Lucio too, because she is pure and virtuous', as one suggested. Very good answers developed such arguments by looking closely at her language: 'her sadomasochism in her language to Angelo is disturbing', an argument proposed by many, as was her 'desire for more restrictions in the convent'. Other very good answers contrasted 'her reaction to Claudio – "beast" and "incestuous" – with her reaction to the "bed-trick" – "the image of it gives her content", both of which are quite disturbing', according to one very good response. Others suggested that becoming a nun was a way of avoiding her fear of her own sexuality. And whilst most learners agreed that it did cause problems, it was only 'because of the male characters and the prevailing attitudes to women and sex in Vienna', as one learner summarised it. There were also discussions on whether her desire to become a nun made her more protective and conscious of her purity and chastity, 'which is at the root of the conflicts in the play and naturally is problematic in a place like Vienna'. Where such arguments were supported by close reference to the text and appropriate contextualisation, the answers did very well.
- (b)** Almost all of the responses to this question had some knowledge and understanding of the two characters and some personal opinions on which to base their essays. Weaker answers often reverted to narrative and summary, often quite detailed and knowledgeable about Lucio and the Duke generally. Better answers at this level were able to discuss humour, comic relief and irony in a useful and direct way, with some learners linking it to the revelation of the Duke at the end of the play. More competent answers saw 'the conundrum of Lucio's foul-mouthed abuse of the Duke with his caring for Claudio and the Duke', as one essay noted. Other sound answers noted 'the Duke's inability to keep cool and his self-defence', whilst others contrasted 'his easiness with Claudio's fate and Lucio's concern about it'. Good answers explored the different kinds of irony: 'Situational, dramatic and linguistic', as one suggested, often with telling use of quotation and reference to the wider text. Very good answers developed such discussions with insight: 'it was dishonest of the Duke to allow Lucio to continue his critical views as he was unaware of the true identity of the person he was addressing', one suggested. Others viewed the Duke as insecure and therefore a representation of the instability in Vienna at the time in which the play was set. This led some into wondering if Lucio's accusations of the Duke's alleged sexual misconduct had some substance. Very good answers linked such ideas to the proliferation of sexually transmitted diseases and the large number of brothels that had opened in Vienna. Very good responses related the flaws of both characters to the difficulty of administering justice more generally. There was also good analysis of language and tone, as well as, in the strongest answers, a good grasp of the dramatic qualities of this scene. However, some thought Lucio's lines were in prose but not those of the Duke, as a

general way of distinguishing those of higher rank, though this was not really applicable to the given passage.

Question 3

WOLE SOYINKA: *The Trials of Brother Jero and Jero's Metamorphosis*

There were too few responses to this text to be able to make a general comment on performance on either option.

Question 4

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

This was the most popular drama text on the paper, with the vast majority of learners choosing the passage (b) option.

- (a) Nearly every response found relevant material with which to address the task, showing at least a basic knowledge and understanding of the text. Weaker answers often focused on unrequited and unfulfilled love as a secret desire which was impacting on different characters – ‘Brick’s love for Skipper, Maggie’s love for Brick and Big Mama’s love for Big Daddy’, as one summarised it. Better answers at this level discussed the characters in turn, suggesting the ‘secret desires which motivate them’, as one put it. Most learners focused on Brick and his secret desires, variously defined as: for Skipper/homosexuality, for past athletic glory, for oblivion and to forget, for a second chance, for Maggie to leave him and for honesty. Other more straightforward answers considered other characters. Popular choices were Maggie’s desire for wealth and Brick’s love (or attention and lust) and Big Daddy’s desires to live, to get back his youth and ‘to be the main man again’, as one learner suggested. Better answers distinguished between desires quite openly displayed such as Maggie’s need for Brick and Mae/Gooper’s need to be in control of the wealth/plantation and more ‘secret’ desires, such as ‘Brick’s repressed homosexuality’. This led more competent responses to link to appropriate contexts, though at times in imprecise, generalised ways. Good answers noted the dramatic effects of these concerns: ‘Whether secret or public, Tennessee Williams highlights this negative emotion running through the Pollitt family as the main cause of conflict in the play’, as one learner expressed it. Other good responses developed such ideas well. ‘Through the characters’ desires for love and wealth, and the destructive effects of acting upon such longing, the playwright portrays the great danger of actions driven by raw, uncontrolled emotions’, as one essay suggested. In focusing on the characters and their interactions, however, few learners considered other dramatic methods in any detail, such as Williams’s use of language and changes in tone and mood. There was also at times too little recognition of the work as a dramatic construct; learners often responded personally to the characters’ situations but with too little awareness of a theatre audience and the dramatic effects created by the actions on a stage.
- (b) All of the responses to this task had some relevant opinions on the two characters. Nearly every response was able to place the passage in the wider text and in many cases showed some knowledge and understanding of the significance of the wider exchange between Maggie and Brick at this point in the play. Weaker answers tended to paraphrase the passage or summarise the relationship and the characters. There is a tendency for weaker candidates to see characters as one dimensional and better responses were able to see the complexity of the characterisation and the relationship and not just see ‘Maggie as after Big Daddy’s money’ or ‘Brick as a repressed homosexual’; weaker responses were often unable to develop beyond such simplistic summaries. More competent responses were aware of the key issues in the context of the wider play – Skipper, Big Daddy’s will, Mae and Gooper’s ambitions and Maggie’s childlessness were all well discussed. Many learners discussed the communication difficulties here and their effect in the play generally: ‘Maggie and Brick’s struggle to communicate leads to rising tensions and in their bedroom, symbolic of the nature of the underlying breakdown’. For others ‘what is not said is also significant’, as one put it, with many noticing the ‘build up to the first mention of Skipper’. Good answers focused on Williams’s methods of characterisation: for example, ‘Maggie’s victimising herself, perhaps because of guilt over Skipper’, as one essay suggested. Brick was also well analysed: ‘His lifelessness and solidity, his unresponsiveness, all symbolised in his name’, as one learner suggested. Good answers developed such arguments through close reference to the text and Williams’s methods, noting Maggie’s different strategies to get Brick’s attention, which ‘ultimately leads to her revelation of Big Daddy’s cancer’, as one learner noted. His indifference becomes ‘cruelty in asking if she wants to be alone’, as one argued, with some learners linking this to his

decision to tell Big Daddy he has cancer. Very good answers considered Williams's dramatic methods in detail, the contrast, for example between 'his emotionless responses and indifference and her emotional journey and engagement'. Other responses noted that 'her true emotions are shown in the stage directions (hence to the audience) rather than spoken aloud to Brick', as one learner argued. Some good essays looked at language in detail: 'His repetitive use of "Maggie" gives him a passive/aggressive tone', according to one, while others analysed her self-awareness: 'hideous transformation' and 'catty' were often very well discussed. There were sensitive readings of both characters at this level: 'Brick and Maggie are both isolated – Brick because of his grief and withdrawal into alcoholism and Maggie by her unfulfilled desire to be loved and to have a baby', as one essay summarised it. Others wondered how the audience might respond as the passage unfolds, for example, to the way in which Brick looks at Maggie making her feel that she is physically repugnant: 'Does this build sympathy for Maggie as well as understanding for Brick?' one learner wondered, 'especially as his repugnance is visually contrasted to her obviously sensual beauty'. Such musings were often supported by precise references to the passage, as well as analytical perception and the essays were both successful and engaging.

Section B: Poetry

Question 5

SIMON ARMITAGE: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

This was a minority choice of text in this session, with learners choosing equally between the two options.

- (a) Nearly every response was able to select relevant material with which to address the task. Lady Bertilak was often the main discussion point, with weaker answers summarising her role and character in the poem, though often without considering Armitage's presentation. Better answers also discussed Morgan Le Faye and Guinevere, with some learners remembering that 'in Camelot Sir Gawain sits by Guinevere'. There was often some contextual support for the learners' opinions. For example, 'it was believed that women were naturally sinful, responsible for the fall of men', with many answers linking the exchanges between Lady Bertilak and Sir Gawain to the story of Adam and Eve. Good answers developed such arguments, noting that 'whilst the Green Knight sets up the temptation of Gawain, the blame falls on his Lady who is presented as a temptress', as one essay expressed it. Other good essays explored Gawain's misogynistic outburst to the Green Knight at the end which for some was 'important to evaluate the way chivalry judged women'. The religious undertone here, again to Adam and Eve, was also seen as important. Very good learners also noted how 'the Chivalric code and its demands of unflinching courtesy to women inevitably effect the way men (and the readers) view the women', as one essay argued. There were relatively few responses that were convincing in analysing Armitage's methods of presentation. One noted that 'Guinevere and Lady Bertilak are often portrayed as physically above Sir Gawain', but, although some were able to discuss Armitage's alliterative verse, this was rarely integrated into the arguments and other poetic methods such as language and imagery were very rarely mentioned.
- (b) Learners who could place the passage in context were at an advantage in discussing its significance in terms of the relationship and the poem more generally. Weaker answers summarised the 'wager' between the two men and often showed secure knowledge of the text, sometimes at the cost of paying too little attention to the passage. Better answers at this level noted it was the first exchange of the wager and so 'significant in terms of themes – honour, truthfulness, chivalry', as one learner noted. The relationship between Gawain and the master was often seen as one of great courtesy as they exchanged winnings, with some noting that 'the master is seen to be testing Gawain's knightly virtues and together they're setting up rules for the game the following day'. Good answers developed these arguments. The passage was about 'the keeping of boundaries, to stop the host's prying, by Sir Gawain's refusal to share information'. Other good answers placed the passage firmly in context: 'Knowing the host is the Green Knight and his wife a "honeytrap" to catch Sir Gawain out is very helpful', as one learner argued. Strong answers also discussed some of Armitage's methods: 'All the people are summoned to what seems like a trial of Sir Gawain', as one suggested, whilst others noted the 'atmosphere of a cross-examination'. Further analysis led to comments such as 'the Lord's questions end in full stops and not question marks and suggest, as we later find out is the truth, he already knows the answers'. Many good responses explored the 'relaxed comfortable sharing relationship as they chat and laugh in front of the fire', as one learner suggested. Alliteration and repetition were often noted as creating the tone and comfortable atmosphere, with some noting that 'the dialogue was used for immediacy and description for detail and shaping the reader's response'. Where such arguments

were supported by detailed reference to the passage and appropriate awareness of contexts, the answers did very well.

Question 6

ROBERT BROWNING: Selected Poems

This was the least popular text in **Section B** with only a small number of responses, the vast majority of which chose the passage **(b)** question.

- (a) There were too few responses to be able to make a general comment on performance on this question.
- (b) Nearly every response to this question had at least a basic knowledge and understanding of the poem and was able to share an engaged personal response. Weaker answers tended to summarise ‘the love situation’ as a way of explaining the speaker’s emotions. Better answers at this level were aware of Browning’s use of dramatic monologue and were able to explore the ‘dramatic qualities as the situation in the laboratory is gradually revealed through her words and supposed actions’, according to one learner. More competent responses were aware of the ‘tone’ with some enjoying the ‘maniacal glee of the speaker’, for example. Good answers charted the woman’s increasing madness as ‘her desire for power and revenge becomes overwhelming’, as one noted. Others were more sympathetic to her situation, analysing her motives, with some well-argued responses viewing the narrator as a sympathetic, even tragic, figure. Very good answers focused on Browning’s methods, analysing the effects of the dramatic monologue, the speaker’s choice of diction, her shifting moods ‘suggestive of her tormented maddened state of mind’, as one suggested and ‘the scientific language of the laboratory so at odds with her crazed words of hate and revenge’, as one noted. Where the learners supported such points with specific reference to the poem and an awareness of appropriate contexts, the answers did very well.

Question 7

GILLIAN CLARKE: Selected Poems

This was a minority choice overall, with most learners choosing the **(b)** passage option.

- (a) There were only a very few responses to this question. Nearly all learners were able to select relevant poems with which to address the task. Popular pairings were *Journey* and *Catrin*, *Scything* and *Catrin*. *Journey* was also paired with a number of more or less relevant poems, such as *Pipistrelle* and *Seal*, though learners struggled to make the seal and pup and ‘the life of the bat and the bumps on the road’ relevant to the task. Some responses to these poems did consider broadly the metaphorical implications of Clarke’s choices. Better answers noted that ‘it was not usually a straightforward discussion’, as Clarke’s concerns ‘are always hidden in metaphors and patterns’, as one learner summarised it. *Catrin* was the most popular choice, with most learners having secure knowledge and understanding of the poem, exploring ‘the unbreakable bond between a mother and daughter relationship, represented through the symbolism of the umbilical cord’, as one essay suggested. Learners linked the poem to *Seal* and *Scything* through the umbilical cord, with better answers analysing its symbolic relevance. Other essays contrasted this mother/daughter relationship with other relationships such as the husband/wife in *My Box* – also viewed symbolically as representing ‘the containment and privacy of a loving relationship between a man and woman’, as one learner suggested. The pairing of *Catrin* with *Journey* was productive, the contrasting relationships in these poems helping learners explore the range of Clarke’s concerns and in the strongest essays, her methods. Few essays were able to get beyond her use of language and imagery, though these were often examined in good detail. Those that did discuss poetic form, tone and narrative voice often did very well, especially where the arguments were rooted in detailed reference to the poems and an appropriate awareness of context.
- (b) This option had far more responses than **(a)** and all but a few learners had at least a basic knowledge and understanding on which to build their responses to ‘the warmth and comfort of the home contrasted to the bleak and inhospitable setting’, as one learner summarised it. A few very weak responses struggled with some of the language and meaning, ‘the cottage has evidently burnt down’, for example, inevitably led to very limited interpretations. Better answers considered the details carefully: ‘the rudimentary life, bare of modern superficialities, which Clarke uses as a symbol for a simple more satisfying style of living’, was a typical comment on her overall concerns.

These interpretations were often more successful where there was a clear grasp of the overall meaning and concerns on which to structure the analysis, e.g. ‘the use of Welsh names and references to two languages to give a historical and grounded sense of the cottage’, as one learner suggested. Competent answers saw how the ‘absence of modern amenities means she and the reader are more aware of the natural beauty and grandeur’, as one learner argued. Good answers explored some of Clarke’s methods in detail. The single stanza (‘shows life here is unending and without breaks’), the ‘simplicity and directness of the opening’, and the ‘understatement of “it’s not easy”’ were all well analysed. Other good responses noted how she ‘engages all our senses: the taste (of nettles) and smell (of sheep) are unpleasant and not welcoming’ was contrasted to her use of imagery and colours to create mood and tone, such as ‘the superficiality of “brochure blues” that contrasted with the simple grandeur of the brown and green mountains’. Other very good answers considered a wide range of poetic methods such as Clarke’s use of listing, conversational tone, free verse and short, stopped lines – all of which were ‘used to show the simplicity of life in this place’, as one essay argued. Some very good answers noticed that the structure and language become more complex – ‘there is more to rural Wales than meets the eye’, as one suggested. Others saw a key concern as ‘physically connecting people to the countryside’ and how the difficulty of living in the countryside ‘breaks down the often romanticised view of country life’, as one learner expressed it. Very good answers were alive to her ‘conversational tone, her personal engagement, so that speaker and poet become one’, as one good essay argued. Many very good answers had a developed sense of context and of the wider text which helped them reach judicious assessments of the significance of this poem to understanding Clarke as a poet more generally.

Question 8

Songs of Ourselves, Volume 2

This was the most popular **Section B** text, though the vast majority of learners chose the passage **(b)** option.

- (a)** This was not a popular question and the range of poems discussed was quite limited, with *In the Park*, *Stabat Mater*, *The Lost Woman...* and *an afternoon nap* being very popular choices. Less successful were those learners who selected poems with little relevance to the given task, such as *‘She was a Phantom of Delight’* and perhaps more desperately *The Storm-Wind* from **Question 8(b)**. Weaker responses were usually able to summarise their chosen poems in at least straightforward detail, with often a basic understanding of the meaning and the poem’s relevance to the task. There were some sensitive readings of the poems. For example, *In the Park*: ‘the mother is viewed as a caring mother who wants her children to be happy in the moment’, whilst other answers recognised that the burden of care often falls on the mother. Other learners were critical of the ambitious mother’s toxicity and lack of compassion towards her son when his grades were poor’. In *an afternoon nap*, some thought the mother ‘was struggling with the isolation of being a single parent and not enjoying motherhood’, as one learner expressed it. There were few good essays on this question and they all moved beyond the context and meaning of the poems to consider the poetic methods used, with some good analysis of the contrasting use of poetic voice and language, for example. Where these were linked to the learner’s interpretation of the poems and supported by precise references, the essays did well.
- (b)** This was a popular choice of question and nearly all learners were able to engage with Barnes’s evocative descriptions of the wind. Weaker answers discussed the wind as ‘intimidating and frightening as the vegetation writhes and quivers’, as one learner suggested. Better answers at this level saw the contrast of ‘the outdoors’ wildness and nature with home, the indoors and calm comfort’, as one essay put it. More competent responses saw the personification of the wind so that it had ‘a destination to reach and was in a hurry to get there’. It was also seen as being symbolic of life where people rush along causing destruction in their hurry. Good answers observed the poem’s form and the shape of the lines, the movement across the stanzas and Barnes’s use of rhymes. A fruitful discussion point in good essays was the structure: ‘3 verses – nature, humans and the speaker – with a volta at the end of stanza 2’, as one learner summarised it. Very good answers analysed the effects of other poetic methods such as alliteration and rhyme which ‘reinforce how the wind has changed between stanza 1 and 3’, as one learner noted. The neat structure of the poem lent itself to developed, structured argument and more successful learners took full advantage, often supporting their discussion with well-tailored critical support. Some very good responses took their interpretations of the poem to another level, suggesting metaphors for life’s struggle and endurance, some of which were more convincing than others, depending on the manner in which such ideas were argued and expressed. Most successful were those learners who could analyse some of the detail in depth, for example ‘the contrast of the wind’s “wild-blowing” and

“her babe sigh”, as one noted, which ‘separates nature and human experience and concerns so graphically’. At this level, analysis of poetic methods was often supported with precise references to the poem and integrated into a well-reasoned and structured interpretation of the poem. Such responses always did very well.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/21
Prose and Unseen

Key messages

- Successful responses focus closely on the writing of the texts and how the writer presents the meaning and content to the reader.
- Responses which rely on summary are not successful.
- Successful responses use analysis of specific references and quotations to support points. This should be particularly remembered for the **(a)** questions, where candidates select their own references to answer the question.
- Successful responses to **(b)** passage questions focus closely on the details of the writing in the selected extract.
- While specific references to other parts of the text are not required in **(b)** passage questions, knowledge of the rest of the text usually informs successful responses.
- In **Section B: Unseen**, successful responses show how the literary features of the text type communicate the meaning and contribute to the reader's understanding of the passage or poem.
- Candidates should carefully read though the Unseen text in order to be confident with its meaning and development before beginning to write the answer to the question.

General comments

Examiners saw responses to all the set texts and unseen passages, which often showed engagement. While most essays showed knowledge of the texts, it was apparent that a number of candidates responded to the **(b)** passage questions on the set texts as unseen material, with no knowledge of the wider text. This usually led to significant errors of understanding and invariably weaker responses. Candidates who can recognise the characters and the significance of the episodes are able to respond much more fully to the questions. Examiners read many well-informed and directed discussions of writers' methods, commenting thoughtfully on choices of language, form and structure. Such candidates, maintaining a firm focus on the writing of the texts and responding to specific question prompts such as 'presentation' and 'ways in which', were the most successful. For **(a)** questions, candidates need secure knowledge of the texts in order to be able to support their argument with analysis of specific episodes. For **(b)** passage questions, they need to focus in detail on the writing of the extract printed on the question paper, using their knowledge of the rest of the text to develop points. Teaching for the Unseen section should introduce candidates to a wide range of writing so that they have a good understanding of the key features and conventions of poetry, prose and drama texts.

Comments on Specific Questions

Section A: Prose

Question 1

Ian McEwan: *Atonement*

- (a)** The question on the importance of writing elicited so many responses which commented on the centrality of the typewriter, and the introduction of Briony at such a machine, that it was clear many candidates were answering on the film rather than McEwan's novel. However, many essays which were more closely focused on the novel considered the centrality of the act of writing and the role played by various different forms of written communication. *The Trials of Arabella*, *Two Figures by a Fountain*, Robbie's crude letter to Cecilia, Cecilia's and Robbie's love letters, the historical accounts of the war which are researched by Briony, and Briony's atonement were all considered in answers to the question. Confident responses were able to show how writing is presented as an

important means of communication in the novel and also how McEwan uses written texts as important narrative devices, especially the way Robbie's erroneous note is used against him and the way his relationship with Cecilia is kept alive during the war with their coded letters. Candidates were also able to explore how Briony's characterisation revolves around her creative writing, starting with her play and gradually further explored during the novel with her Woolf-esque narrative and her final attempt to atone for her wrongs with her writing, especially in the fictive happy reunification of the lovers. Examiners had hoped to see some of these ideas extended to include McEwan's writing and the ways in which his metafiction explores ideas of authorship and truth through the presentation of an author and narrator such as Briony. However, few answers probed this area of consideration.

- (b) Some of the weaker responses did not demonstrate any knowledge of the novel and attempted to answer the passage-based question as unseen material. This was very apparent in those responses which wrote of the suave, courteous and charming qualities of Paul Marshall as presented in the passage. Such answers ignored McEwan's clear indication of tension in the extract and the reference to his 'cruel face'. Candidates with a greater awareness of the novel were able to draw out the proleptic suggestions of the excerpt as Marshall intimidates the children, references are made to his bedroom and the beginnings of attraction between he and Lola are evident in her 'heart... beating painfully hard' and his awareness of her admiration. Confident responses looked at McEwan's careful blending of third person narration and dialogue, so that speech is interspersed with leading narrative comments and descriptions as well as the thoughts of the Quincey children. A few perceptive candidates noted that McEwan keeps only Marshall's thoughts hidden, so reader sympathy is placed more readily with Lola and her brothers. The external description of Marshall's face and manner, both 'cruel' and 'pleasant', drew a lot of appropriate comment as candidates recognised the mysterious ambiguity in Marshall's portrayal. Very few answers demonstrated awareness that McEwan writes this passage with Briony as narrator, who did not witness any of the events, making this excerpt entirely one of Briony's imagination.

Question 2

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o: *Petals of Blood*

- (a) There were too few responses to this question to make a general comment appropriate.
- (b) There were few answers on this text and nearly all of those were on the passage question. However, demonstration of confident knowledge and understanding of the novel was rare. A number of essays took a narrative summary approach which lacked a clear understanding of the characters in the passage. More competent responses developed the comparison between Munira as a father and his own father in the passage, which opens with a paragraph about Mariamu, who stood up to Ezekiel and was 'never rebuked... or dismissed', which some candidates were able to connect with the rumours of her refusing his advances. In the passage, Munira himself makes the comparison with his father in ll.26 – 27, which some candidates noted. Some also discussed how Ngũgĩ presents the tensions in Munira's own family, with his unsuccessful grotesque tales about Ilmorog, which leave his children 'unlaughing' and his wife exclaiming in shock. A few candidates drew in Ngũgĩ's concerns with Christianity in the novel, looking at Ezekiel's hypocrisy and the way in which Munira's wife's religious zeal has 'drained her of all sensuality and what remained now was the cold incandescence of the spirit.'

Question 3

Stories of Ourselves, Volume 2

- (a) When attempting the essay question on two stories, it is of crucial importance to select those which are relevant and helpful in responding to the specific question. A significant number of responses was unsuccessful because candidates chose to write about stories which lacked relevant relationships between male characters, such as *The Tower*, which featured in several essays. *The Paper Menagerie* also proved difficult as many candidates who chose the story could not develop much discussion about Jack and his father, so wrote instead about Jack and his mother. *Death in the Woods* was frequently an unsuccessful choice, with answers focusing on men's relationships with women and often strikingly misinterpreting the story. More successful answers chose their stories wisely and focused clearly on the terms of the question. Writing on *The Paper Menagerie* was more pertinent when candidates looked, as well as at Jack and his father, at the relationship

between Jack and his friend Mark, some also considering Obi-Wan Kenobi and Laohu as characters who represent their owners in their aggressive interaction. This led to thoughtful discussion of Liu's presentation of the clash of the American and Chinese cultures. *The Black Ball* was a story used by many candidates, and with success, as most compared the three central relationships between male characters – that between the narrator and his employer Mr Berry; that between the narrator and the union representative; and that between the narrator and his son. By considering and comparing Ellison's presentation of each of these relationships, candidates were able to explore the heart of the story and its concerns. Specific details, such as John and Berry looking at each other reflected in the brass plate, John gradually losing his distrust of the union man, and the tone and content of John's dialogue with his son were all used to good effect to demonstrate knowledge of the story and understanding of Ellison's narrative methods. *Gabriel-Ernest*, an appropriate choice, was another story which featured frequently. However, many responses demonstrated thin knowledge and significant misunderstanding of the story. Surprisingly, *The Axe* was seldom chosen.

- (b) Many essays on the extract from *An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge* used knowledge of the Civil War context to good effect. It was also helpful if candidates knew the rest of the story and were therefore aware of the reasons for the man's execution. A lack of this knowledge led to misinterpretations which limited the response to the passage. While less successful responses relied on narrative summary, lacking focus on Bierce's presentation of the scene, more competent essays looked at the ways in which the author creates tone and atmosphere through the anonymity of the man and the dispassionate account of the details of the preparation for his hanging. Some commented that the number of soldiers mentioned, and the level of preparation, suggest that the man is desperate and dangerous, which contrasts with his description in the third paragraph, where he is revealed to be a well-dressed and groomed 'civilian' with a 'kindly expression'. This, of course, was where knowledge of the wider story was helpful, as it explains the effects which Bierce achieves with this early contrast. Stronger responses looked closely at the writing, noting the details which Bierce includes to create an impression of military efficiency and precision in the preparations for the execution, with references to 'a cord', 'A rope', 'two private soldiers', 'a sergeant', 'the sentinels', 'a brass cannon commanding the bridge', 'A lieutenant', 'The captain' and so on. This level of preparation creates the reader's expectations for the victim and is a key part of the passage's presentation of the man. Some noted how the details of the hanging mechanism are described in the fourth paragraph to add to this, with 'the plank' being carefully balanced and weighted by the captain and sergeant so that it 'would tilt and the condemned man go down between two ties.' Only a very few responses, and the most successful, considered the effects of Bierce's choice of narrative perspective, beginning with a distanced, emotionless third person narrator who records such detail with equanimity, before the key shift in l.51 where the narrative focalises the condemned man's consciousness as he 'let his gaze wander to the swirling water'. There were a few perceptive comments on the sudden increase of pace with the 'swirling' stream which is 'racing madly', increasing the sense of the man's danger for the reader, while a small handful of responses noted that the 'dancing driftwood' following the current is a foreshadowing of the man's own imagined escape. The disconnection between the 'racing' water and the man's sense of how 'slowly' the 'sluggish stream' moves in the man's perception was noted in some answers, with comments on the distortion of time at the moment of oncoming death, but there was little acknowledgment that the final two sentences of the passage are in the condemned man's own voice.

Question 4

Mark Twain: *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

- (a) Many answers to this question relied on lists of different characters' misdemeanours and the way they had or had not been punished. Such responses showed knowledge of the plot and characters of the novel but demonstrated limited understanding of Twain's literary presentation or its effects. More successful essays shaped the response around considerations of justice or morality. In these, the arbitrariness of punishment was considered in Twain's presentation of the Grangerford and Shepherdson feud and the dispute between Sherburn and Boggs. Both of these episodes, candidates suggested, showed the lawlessness of society, where individuals can take fatal vengeance for little actual wrongdoing. These examples were sometimes contrasted with Twain's presentation of the Duke and the King, who are shown swindling different people and communities through a substantial part of the novel with no consequences until they are caught, tarred and feathered towards the end. Some of the more successful responses also focused on Huck himself, considering his lies and thieving, with some argument that these are skills he has learned from

Pap. However, the most interesting answers considered those moments of Huck's own moral dilemmas, where he believes he is committing a great wrong and will be punished by 'hell' because he protects Jim. This led to some discussion of Twain's satire of American southern states society, firmly adhering to Christian principles while owning and selling slaves, to such a degree that Huck feels he is committing a great wrong to hide Jim.

- (b) Most of the weaker responses to the passage from the opening of the novel offered little more than summary. A few pointed out that Twain establishes Huck's narrative voice with the use of elisions and grammatical errors, which suggest a lack of formal education, and there was some discussion of his resistance to Widow Douglas' plan to 'sivilize' him. The more successful answers looked more carefully at the narrative voice, noting the use of the second person in the direct address to the reader right from the beginning and the chatty style created by the frequent dashes, colloquial language and phrases such as 'as I said before.' Comments about Huck's aversion to civilisation were developed more effectively when candidates considered the reference to his greater comfort in his 'old rags and my sugar-hogshead' and his discomfort with the feeling of being 'all cramped up' in the 'new clothes' provided by the widow. Examiners saw some thoughtful comment on how Twain in the third paragraph shows Huck's feelings of constraint through his language – the sense of order in 'you had to come to time' and 'you could not go right to eating' and his reference to prayer as the Widow 'grumbl(ing) a little over the victuals'. Huck's dismissal of Moses, because he 'had been dead a considerable long time', also drew appropriate comment, as well as his perception of the Widow's hypocrisy because she 'took snuff', which was 'all right, because she done it herself.' Surprisingly not included in most of the answers was an appreciation of the humour of the passage in the way some of Huck's misunderstanding and feelings are communicated. Very few mentioned Twain's self-referential comments at all.

Section B: Unseen

Question 5 – Prose

Examiners saw some interesting and thoughtful responses to the unseen prose passage. Many candidates noted the way the writer presents the narrator's sense of superiority in the conversation, many being critical of his snobbery. Most assumed it was a male narrator, though a few saw a female perspective. Picking up on the narrator's education, having taken 'a London science degree', candidates were struck by the 'astonishment' expressed at the other man and the sense of contempt in 'I almost laughed outright.' They noted that what might be a factual description, using adjectives such as 'ragged', 'dirty', 'unshaven' and 'unkempt' is taken further with the almost sneering 'he looked as though he had been left in a dust-bin for a week.' This led to many responses taking a sympathetic view of the other man, noting that he is 'very composed' under the slighting jokes of the narrator and sympathising with his statement that he is 'sick of being disbelieved'. Candidates were also alert to the man's repeated insistence that he 'made' the diamond, but fewer engaged with the way the writer presents the tests of its authenticity. The paragraph 11.23 – 30 offered a number of opportunities to explore how the writing suggests that it is a real diamond, with the narrator's knowledge of 'mineralogy', the care of his observations and use of technical vocabulary. In 1.40 the narrator states that he 'believed it was a diamond', which raises reader curiosity in the man's claim that he manufactured 'a Behemoth of diamonds' yet remains 'hopelessly hard-up'. This pushes the passage towards an extract from speculative or fantasy fiction and answers could have explored how that fantasy is communicated in very realistic language, with the source of its fantasy tested by a rational narrator. A few responses looked at the balance of narrative and dialogue in the passage. There was some thoughtful discussion of the way in which the writer gives the diamond maker a voice through the dialogue, but the central perception of the episode rests with the first person narrator, so that the diamond maker is made the outsider, mysterious and doubted.

Question 6 – Drama

Candidates engaged readily with this drama extract, picking up on the core differences between Petruchio and Rosaline in their attitudes to war, which were then often related to gender. An interestingly high number of candidates sided with Rosaline, supporting her view that conflict and the immediacy of death makes life worth living. In several responses, this was a reaction against Petruchio's traditional view of gender, with candidates taking offence at his view that Rosaline's masculine clothes 'do not make a man of' her and that women have a 'social role.' Many therefore assumed that the conflict was about gender roles themselves, which led to a number of essays exploring gender issues in a way which demonstrated considerable personal response, but without those ideas being related closely to the text on the question paper. More focused answers noted the sudden dramatic effects created on stage by the opening stage directions, the importance of Rosaline's costume and the visual and auditory impression created by her unrolling of the

'bundle' of swords. The central language balance between 'war' and 'peace' was noted and a number of essays noted how the dramatist maintains this balance in the patterns of dialogue, with Rosaline and Petruchio at times speaking in parallel phrases. Good answers also recognised the repeated sense of challenge in the dialogue, with frequent questions and some suggested that towards the end of the passage, Petruchio is presented as more selfish with repeated use of the first person singular, while Rosaline tends to use 'We'. Many candidates responded to the passage as drama, with an appreciation of lighting, costume, props and movement. Others needed to comment in more detail in the treatment of the final section from l.32. Few candidates commented on the use of verse dialogue or engaged with the details of the speeches. There could have been more discussion of who Rosaline considers to be 'heroes' and her perception of old age and the role of poetry. Few commented on Petruchio's repeated 'I want...' lines and his appeal to the cycle of seasons in the natural world, envisioning a future which is absent from Rosaline's lines.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/22
Prose and Unseen

Key messages

- Successful responses focus closely on the writing of the texts and how the writer presents the meaning and content to the reader.
- Responses which rely on summary are not successful.
- Successful responses use analysis of specific references and quotations to support points. This should be particularly remembered for the **(a)** questions, where candidates select their own references to answer the question.
- Successful responses to **(b)** passage questions focus closely on the details of the writing in the selected extract.
- While specific references to other parts of the text are not required in **(b)** passage questions, knowledge of the rest of the text usually informs successful responses.
- In **Section B: Unseen**, successful responses show how the literary features of the text type communicate the meaning and contribute to the reader's understanding of the passage or poem.
- Candidates should carefully read though the Unseen text in order to be confident with its meaning and development before beginning to write the answer to the question.

General comments

Examiners saw responses to all the set texts and unseen passages, which often showed engagement. While most essays showed knowledge of the texts, it was apparent that a number of candidates responded to the **(b)** passage questions on the set texts as unseen material, with no knowledge of the wider text. This usually led to significant errors of understanding and invariably weaker responses. Candidates who can recognise the characters and the significance of the episodes are able to respond much more fully to the questions. Examiners read many well-informed and directed discussions of writers' methods, commenting thoughtfully on choices of language, form and structure. Such candidates, maintaining a firm focus on the writing of the texts and responding to specific question prompts such as 'presentation' and 'ways in which', were the most successful. For **(a)** questions, candidates need secure knowledge of the texts in order to be able to support their argument with analysis of specific episodes. For **(b)** passage questions, they need to focus in detail on the writing of the extract printed on the question paper, using their knowledge of the rest of the text to develop points. Teaching for the Unseen section should introduce candidates to a wide range of writing so that they have a good understanding of the key features and conventions of poetry, prose and drama texts.

Comments on Specific Questions

Section A: Prose

Question 1

Ian McEwan: *Atonement*

- (a)** Candidates need to remember the importance of carefully reading and responding to the full question wording. Nearly all candidates were ready to write about Briony, and even Briony's role, but the explicit focus of her role *as a narrator* eluded a significant number of answers. This led a number of essays to be narrative accounts of what Briony says and does in the novel, with little attention to how McEwan changes the reader's perspective and experience through his use of the character as the narrator. More successful answers acknowledged that the reader is unaware of her narrative role until a considerable way through the novel and only fully grasps the extent of it in the 'London 1999' section. Some of the strongest answers then unpicked how the reader might re-

examine the earlier parts of the novel, considering in particular Briony's presentation of her younger self in Part 1 and how she narrates the circumstances of her false accusation of Robbie. Some thoughtful responses considered how Briony as narrator uses the perspective of different characters, often with key focus on the different versions of the fountain scene. Many were familiar with the concept of an unreliable narrator and some were able to apply this idea with care to the novel. Interestingly, few considered Part 2 and how Briony focalises her version of Robbie's perspective during the flight to Dunkirk. Most confident candidates centred their essays on the final section of the novel, the first to be written in the first person, where Briony directly addresses issues of memory, narration, authorship and, importantly, guilt. This led to some thoughtful consideration of her narrative as her attempt at atonement, with the earlier parts of the novel considered in this light. There were several strong arguments that in seeking to reveal the 'truth' and thus atone for her wrong, she in fact narrates in such a way to excuse her crime as childish misunderstanding and therefore attempts to exonerate herself. Such answers naturally paid attention to the revelation of the false happy ending for Robbie and Cecilia, with arguments on either side about the ways an author can play 'god' in their narrative. Some perceptive responses discussed the shifts in language and tone of the narrative voice as the novel progressed and highlighted this in parallel with the changes and maturation in Briony's character. These were most successful when supported with specific quotations and analysis. A large number of candidates explored the concepts of the homodiegetic and the heterodiegetic narrator, which was insightful when this aspect of literary theory had been completely understood in relation to *Atonement*. A very few widened the argument to include McEwan's creation of Briony's narration and the way the resultant novel questions the whole act of story-telling and its relationship with truth.

- (b) Most candidates recognised that the temple is in some ways symbolic, which led to many essays asserting that it represents various characters – Briony, Cecilia and Paul Marshall were among the favourites – without paying much attention to the writing of the passage. The 'Comment closely' imperative in (b) passage questions is crucial; candidates need to pay very close attention to the author's use of language, form and structure. More successful answers demonstrated that McEwan indicates the temple's fakery from the first sentence, writing that it is 'built in the style of Nicholas Revett' as an 'eye-catching feature' with 'no religious purpose at all.' They recognised that the temple is an architectural folly, a deceptive building erected for visual purposes. Examiners saw some thoughtful writing on the way the temple's decline is described. There were perceptive comments on the imagery of illness in the 'mottled, diseased appearance' and the simile which compares the 'exposed laths' with 'the ribs of a starving animal'. This gradual decline through neglect was compared with the active damage caused by Leon 'and his terrible friends from school', whose vandalism has destroyed 'the pretty, Georgian windows'. The second paragraph was often less fully, and less successfully, treated. Some noted how the Tallis family lacks interest in the 'useless little building', noting the disparagement and diminutive in the line. There were few answers which showed understanding of the phrase 'orphan of a grand society lady', which relates to the temple's relationship with the original country house, by this stage of the novel long 'burned-down'. Responses which were based on a confident grasp of the text argued that the fake façade of the temple represents the Tallis family, who present themselves as a sophisticated and civilised family, when in fact they are careless and destructive of those around them, notably Robbie, while Jack and Emily have a sham marriage which leads to inadequate parenting. A very few also linked the temple's dilapidation and decline to the decline of the moneyed class in England, a gradual process which was accelerated by the destruction of the Second World War and the rise of opportunistic business nouveau riche such as Paul Marshall. There was some perceptive comment too on the temple as a key location for different events in the novel.

Question 2

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o: *Petals of Blood*

- (a) This was another question which required some precision in shaping a response to the wording. Examiners saw a significant number of answers which asserted that narrative structure was effective without focusing on the shifts between the present and the past. Others referred to time shifts and asserted that Ngũgĩ used them to present poverty, or women, or politics, without any specific examples of the ways in which this occurred. Other candidates had difficulty moving past narration, often simply referring to past events and present events in their discussion, rather than discussing the effects of the narrative structure. More successful responses considered the ways in which Ngũgĩ reveals the past lives of his four central characters, Munira, Wanja, Karega and Abdullah. They discussed how the shifts in time convey the impact of colonialism and post colonialism on Kenyan society at all levels. The most successful candidates were able to look at

the novel in detail, considering key points where the chronology shifts and discussing how precise moments of revelation of past events affect the way the reader responds to characters. For example, some candidates picked out that the moment of learning what happened to Wanja's child comes quite late in the novel when she has already gained the reader's sympathy. Others considered how characters tell the story of their own pasts, or remember them, like Abdulla's memories of his Mau Mau days on the route to the city. The most successful considered how Ngũgĩ uses the police investigation into the fire and murder to shape the novel, starting at that point before stepping back 'twelve years' to Munira's arrival in Ilmorog. Inspector Godfrey's questioning of Munira maintains the 'present' of the novel, while at different points Ngũgĩ explores the mythic past of Kenya, the foundation of Ilmorog, the colonial regime, resistance to it, independence and the creation of New Ilmorog. By exploring the past of the characters, Ngũgĩ explores the past of Kenya, in particular the pains of the past colonial era and the present postcolonial corruption of independence.

- (b) Candidates who attempted this question without a grasp of the wider novel struggled to identify Munira's 'horse' as his bicycle, could not identify the 'old woman' and frequently completely misunderstood the second half of the passage by attributing all her questions about the city to Munira. Opinion was divided about whether Munira was offering a traditional education or one based on colonial ideas. More thoughtful and well-informed responses noted that the episode occurs early in Munira's time in Ilmorog, when he is unknown and the villagers are suspicious about him. These dealt carefully with the presentation of his interaction with Muriuku, noting Ngũgĩ's suggestion of Munira's energy in 'galloped', 'in pursuit' and 'ran', while analysis of the dialogue highlighted the boy's reluctant and brief replies to Munira's questioning while 'holding back laughter with difficulty.' Perceptive answers noted that the dialogue is reversed in the dialogue with the old woman, where she is given substantial questions while Munira has monosyllabic replies. Those with an awareness of the novel identified Nyakinyua and her significant role in Ilmarog, which makes her questioning significant, as she is the mouthpiece of the village's suspicion about the newcomer. Her pointed questions about the city also mark the separation between the wealth and the values of urban and rural Kenya. Candidates noted the intimidating quality of her position 'in the middle of the narrow track' and in her repeated questions. Her long speech at the end of the extract repaid careful examination, with some candidates exploring the indications of the abandonment of Ilmorog and villages like it, and the parallel she draws between the current state of independent Kenya with the times of 'our people in the face of the Mzungu invasion'. Observant answers noted that her tone of challenge continues with the repeated rhetorical questions, and it was helpful to observe that after this difficult beginning, Munira is accepted and gains status within the village.

Question 3

Stories of Ourselves, Volume 2

- (a) *The Black Ball, The Plantation, The Paper Menagerie, The Melancholy Hussar of the German Legion* and *The Doll's House* were some of the stories which proved successful in discussion of the presentation of relationships between the younger and older generations. Essays explored class and prejudice, considering how Liu and Mansfield present adults who pass on prejudice to the next generation, resisted by Kezia in *The Doll's House*, where she and the lamp are used as a symbol for hope and a change in attitudes between the generations. Some candidates discussed ways in which fathers are presented seeking to improve the lot of their sons in Ellison's and Adagha's stories, by nurture in Ellison and misjudged and ultimately disastrous greed in Adagha. Both of these stories presented opportunities to discuss how the writers used structure to guide the reader's response to the parental roles. As well as considering the overheard comments of neighbours, candidates discussed ways in which Liu teases out the differences in Jack's relationships with his father and mother, which again gave opportunities to discuss structure and the use of the device of the letter at the end of the story. A few candidates thoughtfully considered the role of Phyllis' father in Hardy's story, governed by social decorum and exerting his will over that of his daughter. Successful answers went well beyond a recall of characters and plot, depending on precise discussion of structure, language, symbolism and characterisation.
- (b) A number of candidates attempted this question with limited knowledge of the story. This led to weaker responses showing limited comprehension of Phyllis' situation, misunderstanding the encounter with Henry Gould and sometimes even confusing that character with Matthäus Tina. Knowledge of the later part of the story enriched answers considerably, enabling a discussion of Hardy's grim ironies, while a lack of such knowledge was significantly limiting. The most successful

answers were able to place the passage very securely within the wider story and pay close attention to the details of Hardy's writing. For example, perceptive responses often began with the symbolic positioning of Phyllis on 'a fence... along the turnpike road', setting up the episode which places her at a crucial juncture of decision making and the choice of which path to follow. Similarly, Hardy's language use in the creation of tension was often noted, with 'tension of her nerves', 'trying' and 'impatiently'. As some candidates commented, the chance encounter and overhearing of Humphrey Gould is a coincidence typical of Hardy's narrative structure and the 'present', as well as Gould's disparaging comments about 'those Hanoverian soldiers' were noted, more successful when candidates were aware that Matthäus Tina is one of them, making the comment particularly poignant for Phyllis. Some straightforward responses considered that Phyllis is swayed against her meeting with Tina because of the materialistic attractions of the present, but more competent answers which drew on a more careful reading of the passage were able to show how Hardy emphasises the tightening of social constraints around Phyllis, evident in such phrases as 'the enormity of her conduct' and 'conscience-stricken' because she 'had promised Humphrey Gould'. There were some perceptive comments on Hardy's balancing of words, such as 'esteem' taking the place of 'love' and the sad equivalence of 'marry him, and suffer.' In this way, candidates argued, Hardy is able to maintain the reader's sympathy for Phyllis and admire her decision to wait for Tina to tell him 'face to face' 'candidly that she had changed her mind'. Some compared her break of faith with Tina with his refusal to break his promise with his friend and his lack of reproach for her. Phyllis' emotional state was recognised in the phrase 'terrible ordeal' and the irony of her 'fearing for his safety'. Candidates needed knowledge of Tina's discovery and death, and Gould's previous marriage, to make full sense of the way Hardy presents Phyllis' experience in this passage.

Question 4

Mark Twain: *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

- (a) While there were not many responses to this question, candidates who attempted it were nearly always comfortable with looking at different attitudes to money typified by Judge Thatcher, Pap, the Duke and the King, Jim and Huck himself. Most began with the money found by Huck and Tom Sawyer and its safekeeping by the Judge, and there were harsh judgements on Pap and his renewed interest in his son in order to gain the money. Some candidates were able to recall examples of the Duke's and the King's trickery in detail, with the most successful concentrating in particular on the episode of attempting to defraud the Wilks girls out of their inheritance. However, more could often have been said about the role Huck plays here in foiling the plot and engineering the return of the money to the sisters. A number of thoughtful responses extended the consideration of actual coinage to look at Jim himself, and how as a slave in the southern states of America he represents monetary value. This led to discussion of Huck's moral growth and Jim's true worth as a friend and father figure, brought out particularly when the Duke and the King attempt to sell him.
- (b) The passage was the more popular option and again lack of knowledge of the novel limited some responses and led to significant misunderstanding. Among these were answers by candidates who thought that Pap was actually on the raft, thus missing the key impact of the passage. Some essays dealt in a straightforward manner with the passage in a narrative fashion with some commentary on the men's hunt for the runaway slave, Huck's ability to lie and the man's eventual generosity in his gift of the coin. More nuanced responses dealt with the details and ambiguities of the passage by looking closely at Twain's writing. These commented on the societally-approved racism apparent in the men's search and Huck's initial moral struggle as he ironically struggles with the lie and the truth as 'the words would not come'. After his breakthrough lie that the man on the raft is 'white', candidates noted that Huck then becomes skilled and adept, leading the men on into misapprehension as the tension is increased with their decision to 'go and see for ourselves'. While competent responses showed Huck's pretence of disease, the more confident and perceptive essays demonstrated their awareness of how Twain shows Huck's skill in leading the men to their own conclusions. The details of Huck's play-acting were noted, included the speeches broken by dashes, which crucially omit any reference to an actual disease in l.17, and his 'blubbling'. Perceptive answers noted the irony of Huck's encouraging the boat towards the raft when he in fact wants the opposite and how Twain shows his success with the movement of the boat – the men first 'laid to their oars', then 'They stopped pulling' before the urgent command 'Set her back, John, set her back'. It is the man in the boat who identifies 'the small-pox' which reverses their search. Sensitive and perceptive essays unpicked layers of irony in the man's final long speech: on the one hand, he is generous to Huck, giving him the 'twenty dollar gold piece', a substantial sum, and offering advice. On the other hand, this generous man is also one who deals with human beings as

chattels, one who refuses to help a family who he believes is struggling with illness, and his advice to Huck is to inflict that illness surreptitiously on another community. In terms of style, few candidates explored the fact that this passage consists almost entirely of dialogue, and the effects of that.

Section B: Unseen

Question 5 – Poetry

Many candidates opted for this question and engaged enthusiastically and thoughtfully with the poem. A key discriminator between answers was the extent to which the actual words were analysed, rather than lapsing into general discussions suggested by the topic. A significant number of essays discussed husbands and domestic chores, while others wrote about the fact that the woman was doing a man's job, although these ideas are not actually communicated within the poem's lines. More secure answers made reference to the overseer and what the figure might mean in terms of male power, work and slavery. Some candidates missed the presence of the overseer and attributed the 'sneering' tone to the speaker, which was a significant misreading. More recognised that the speaker is sympathetic towards a woman who is struggling to retain her dignity in the face of oppressive work. Those essays which looked closely at the language, imagery and structure found much to say, with a number of suggestions that the continuous enjambment between lines and stanzas with virtually no punctuation is reflective of the woman's constant unvarying work. Many also commented successfully on the similes in the poem. Examiners saw some thoughtful discussion of how the woman is only 'like a woman', separated from her own femininity, but that this is a conscious attempt to separate herself from being dehumanised 'like ... cattle'. Her attempt to hold herself 'like/royal cane' was seen as the opposite of the comparison with 'cattle', connecting her with regal bearing as well as the straightness of the crop where she perhaps works, indicating her upright posture 'of dignity'. Many candidates noted the repetition and ellipsis in the line 'like like ... cattle', suggesting that it evokes a sense of the speaker struggling to find words, reflecting disgust at the poor woman's plight. There were also perceptive comments on repetition, which is suggested first by the 'daily going out/and coming in/always' then picked up in the language with 'tried hard' and 'tried very hard', 'hurried/along' and 'hurrying them along', 'the quickening darkness' and 'the quickening/darkness', 'sneering' and 'sneered' and the repetition of 'pulling herself' and 'pathetic'. There were comments about how the repeated phrases are often ones which denote the woman's effort and the overseer's scorn. Many candidates looked closely at some of the effects created by the poet's choices of line breaks. They discussed particularly the emphasis placed on 'steps', 'darkness', 'like a woman' and 'royal cane'. The final stanza drew a number of viable interpretations, such as that the woman has become the 'waterpot' of the title, a vessel for life and growth in spite of oppression. The two most common interpretations opposed each other. Some recognised a sudden change of tone in 'O but look', helping the reader to visualise the woman in a new way, walking upright with the pot on her head, carrying the life source with her and presenting her and the pot as an organic whole, transcending the overseer's 'sneering'. The other view was the opposite, taking 'O but look' to be the vocalisation of the overseer's scorn, and the stanza being his sarcastic comment on the woman's 'pathetic display/of dignity'. Candidates were given credit for any interpretation which was carefully argued and supported.

Question 6 – Prose

While nearly all candidates appreciated the sense of mystery created through the passage, some were limited in their responses because they had not read the passage through carefully enough. Quite a few, for example, thought the figure in the sea was actually dead, or was in fact some kind of mermaid or sea monster, despite the dialogue in the second half. More successful responses noted the stepped pace of the revelations, moving from 'something' through 'the naked body of a man' and 'A headless corpse' to 'a resting swimmer'. Several sound answers noted the way the reader receives this information through the first person narrator's own perceptions, making the discoveries as he does and so sharing the doubt and suspense. Few, though, quite identified the ironic tone of voice in his retrospective narration. Many selected key quotations which create tension in the first paragraph, though fewer were able to develop an analytical appreciation of the language. More confident candidates were able to discuss the Gothic tone of the scene, starting in darkness with the 'glassy shimmer of the sea' and including 'summer lightning in a night sky.' There were comments on the 'faint flash of phosphorescent light', noting its auditory qualities, and the 'greenish cadaverous glow', which is unearthly and suggestive of a monstrous apparition. Observant candidates noted how the swimmer's body is gradually composed from its initially separate constituent parts, the 'pair of feet, the long legs, a broad livid back' until 'he raised up his face'. Even when the figure is clearly a man, it was observed that the writer and narrator still use marine comparisons, such as 'ghastly, silvery, fish-like' to maintain the eerie atmosphere. Candidates overall focused more on the first two paragraphs of narration and often neglected to discuss the following dialogue in as much detail. Some noted the contrast between the shock which sends the narrator's cigar into the sea with 'a tiny plop and a short hiss' and the 'ordinary tone'

he employs when he addresses the man, sometimes seeing it as an act of bravado after ‘the horrid, frost-bound sensation which had gripped’ his ‘chest’. However, there were comparatively few comments on the almost comic contrast between the uncanny atmosphere and the formal ordinariness of the dialogue, beginning with the simple exchange ‘What’s the matter?’ and the reply ‘Cramp’. Similarly, the casual address ‘Look here, my man’ was often missed. However, most noted the significance of the last line of the extract where the narrator reveals himself as the captain. Some candidates observed that the reader of the whole text would probably already be aware of the narrator’s identity, creating dramatic irony when the swimmer asks, ‘I suppose your captain’s turned in?’, which furthers the narrative effects of the passage.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/23
Prose and Unseen

Key messages

- Successful responses focus closely on the writing of the texts and how the writer presents the meaning and content to the reader.
- Responses which rely on summary are not successful.
- Successful responses use analysis of specific references and quotations to support points. This should be particularly remembered for the **(a)** questions, where candidates select their own references to answer the question.
- Successful responses to **(b)** passage questions focus closely on the details of the writing in the selected extract.
- While specific references to other parts of the text are not required in **(b)** passage questions, knowledge of the rest of the text usually informs successful responses.
- In **Section B: Unseen**, successful responses show how the literary features of the text type communicate the meaning and contribute to the reader's understanding of the passage or poem.
- Candidates should carefully read though the Unseen text in order to be confident with its meaning and development before beginning to write the answer to the question.

General comments

Examiners saw responses to all the set texts and unseen passages, which often showed engagement. While most essays showed knowledge of the texts, it was apparent that a number of candidates responded to the **(b)** passage questions on the set texts as unseen material, with no knowledge of the wider text. This usually led to significant errors of understanding and invariably weaker responses. Candidates who can recognise the characters and the significance of the episodes are able to respond much more fully to the questions. Examiners read many well-informed and directed discussions of writers' methods, commenting thoughtfully on choices of language, form and structure. Such candidates, maintaining a firm focus on the writing of the texts and responding to specific question prompts such as 'presentation' and 'ways in which', were the most successful. For **(a)** questions, candidates need secure knowledge of the texts in order to be able to support their argument with analysis of specific episodes. For **(b)** passage questions, they need to focus in detail on the writing of the extract printed on the question paper, using their knowledge of the rest of the text to develop points. Teaching for the Unseen section should introduce candidates to a wide range of writing so that they have a good understanding of the key features and conventions of poetry, prose and drama texts.

Comments on Specific Questions

Section A: Prose

Question 1

Ian McEwan: *Atonement*

- (a)** Though the question highlights one of the key techniques and concerns of McEwan's novel, a minority of candidates attempted it. Most candidates who chose it, though, demonstrated a clear interest in this aspect of the text. They wrote about how a reader gains a fuller picture of events through multiple perspectives, learning more about the event itself and the characters who view it. Confident responses took this further, acknowledging Briony as the overall narrator, and hence the one creating and controlling all the other characters' perspectives. This often led to discussion of the effects of McEwan's choice of an unreliable narrator with an obvious agenda to narrate the perspectives of others as well as her own, making the different perspectives unreliable in turn. Key episodes considered in this discussion were the scenes at the fountain and in the library, both of

which are pivotal in the novel's structure. Some also considered Briony's use of Robbie's perspective in Part 2, relating his war experiences, often seen as her attempt to render him heroic as part of her atonement. Fewer considered the use of Emily Tallis' perspective. More straightforward responses tended to focus more on how situations can be easily misread, using Briony's interpretation of the key episodes and the subsequent events that lead from them.

- (b) A feature of many essays in response to this passage was a long contextual introduction about literary theory, often with little direct reference to the question. Some of these essays became general essays about structuralism and the use of homodiegetic and heterodiegetic narrators, only using the passage as a slight springboard. Such candidates might have been better suited to the (a) question, where wider theoretical discussion is perhaps better placed. Having said that, there were certainly examples of essays which used the theory extremely effectively to interrogate McEwan's presentation of Briony and her actions in the passage, closely analysing the way the narrative presents her, then reconsidering that presentation in the light of the reader's ultimate knowledge of her narrative role. This led to some examples of very sophisticated writing, where theory was matched with close, detailed passage analysis. Equally, there were more straightforward responses which did not consider Briony's narrative and concentrated on McEwan's presentation of her search of her sister's room and her delivering of Robbie's note. Most candidates considered ways in which the passage shows Briony's disgust at Cecilia's bedroom, with the exclamations and repeated questions as well as the details listing her possessions which either 'lay in a tangle' even though they are 'silky expensive-looking things', or lie in a 'mess' without their 'lids and screwtops'. Some made deft connections with the description of the order of Briony's room earlier in the novel. They noted her judgement of her sister, despite Cecilia's being 'ten years older' and that she feels protective, 'thinking clearly, on her behalf', while Cecilia is 'quite hopeless and helpless'. Examiners also saw much comment on the way Briony is presented as someone disconnected from events in the household, as she concentrates on her 'triumph' and seems not to understand why the adults are 'tired, miserable' and 'no one paid her any attention'. Despite her illicit search of her sister's room for Robbie's note, she seems to have little awareness of and little empathy for Lola after her assault, as she is too consumed with her own role in the drama. Many candidates commented on how this is emphasised by the way she had imagined the revelation scene would occur, with 'everyone reading' Robbie's letter 'at once.' There were, though, a number of candidates who misread this paragraph, believing it to reveal not only Briony's belief in her own importance, but the insignificance of what she has done. These candidates mistakenly thought that the impassivity of the policeman with the 'face of granite' indicates that he is not interested in the letter and that Leon's comment that 'It's just a letter' emphasises its insignificance, not realising that Leon is attempting to avoid passing the note to his mother. More confident responses went beyond this presentation to consider McEwan's creation of an older Briony creating the perspective of a younger self, a conscience-stricken writer trying to atone for a childhood mistake through an invented fiction. Here Briony the writer is recreating the events, presenting herself as a naïve and childish figure who hands the note sealing Robbie's characterisation as a sex 'maniac'. Discussion of McEwan's narrative structure acknowledged that this realisation is only possible on a second reading, but that this reconsideration completely alters the reader's experience of the text and the events it describes.

Question 2

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o: *Petals of Blood*

- (a) There were very few responses to this question, though Examiners saw some comment about Ngũgĩ's creation of a shaping detective thriller style with the Inspector's investigation, which allows the gradual uncovering of not only the story, but the corruption of independent Kenya and the betrayal of the ideals of freedom. These answers argued that by this means, Ngũgĩ communicates ideas about social injustice, as for much of the investigation, Inspector Godfrey focuses on the wrong prime suspect in Karega because of a personal prejudice against his left wing support for workers' rights. They also discussed the revelation of Munira's religious obsession, which is key to the crime. Some responses also commented on the cynical way the investigation is closed, leaving the wider issues of corruption uninvestigated.
- (b) Though there were more responses than the (a) question, again there were few answers on this passage. There was confusion in some essays about the identity of the victim of the fire and some were uncertain about whether the reader is guided to admire Wanja's cousin's financial power, or to see her as a victim of both male exploitation and capitalist Kenya. Stronger candidates suggested that Ngũgĩ's portrayal is deliberately ambiguous and placed this episode within a

discussion of the novel's presentation of the wider struggle of women in post-independence Kenya, particularly working class women. There were thoughtful explorations of ways in which Ngũgĩ presents the treatment of women at the hands of men in the novel and the impact of this memory on Wanja, with the comment 'There is one picture that always comes to mind. Wherever I go, whatever I do ... well ... it follows me.' Confident candidates recognised how the cruelty of the husband is emphasised by his connection to the Home Guard and commented on the chilling description of the aunt's scream and the sight that greets the characters when they rush out. The more developed responses noted the details and implications, such as that the Aunt is not the intended victim, and that the murder is explained away with the story of her possibly catching 'fire while lighting the Nyitira which spilt out oil and flames on her clothes.' Though Wanja's family is 'clear that (her) cousin's husband must have done it', this is another case in the novel of the lack of justice. A few candidates noted that Munira's reaction to the story is to feel 'a little uneasy', as if feeling male guilt at such a destructive possessive jealousy. A number of candidates noted the importance of fire in the novel, often associated with Wanja, and the way that this episode foreshadows the burning of her premises and the murders at the centre of the novel.

Question 3

Stories of Ourselves, Volume 2

- (a) This was a popular question and many candidates seemed to enjoy writing about independent female characters. Real success, though, depended on more than the ability to recall and describe such characters, which was the extent of less accomplished responses. A range of stories was used, with *The Tower*, *When It Happens* and *The Lady's Maid's Bell* being the most frequently cited, but *The Melancholy Hussar of the German Legion*, *The Doll's House* and *Death in the Woods* also appearing. Confident responses to *The Tower* appreciated Laski's gothic framing of the story, the presentation of Caroline's dangerous ascent and the climax of the impossibly-continuing number of steps as she descends again. The story was usually seen as Caroline's rebellion against the patriarchal oppression of her condescending husband, interpreted as a reincarnation of Niccolo di Ferramano by some candidates. Some answers argued that, through Mrs Burridge's efforts to survive, Atwood suggests that in any future disaster seeking your own course will be the only solution. Capable answers were able to demonstrate how Atwood weaves together Mrs Burridge's actual privations with those of her imagination, creating the uneasy tone of the narrative. Candidates also discussed the portrayal of Hartley as an unconfident girl recovering from illness, who nevertheless resists Mr Brympton and helps his wife in Edith Wharton's story, and sometimes suggested that Emma Saxon is an even more striking example of a determined woman, protecting Mrs Brympton even after her death. Other characters who were the subject of thoughtful discussion were Kezia in *The Doll's House*, resisting the social rules imposed by her family; Phyllis in *The Melancholy Hussar of the German Legion* who momentarily tries to forge her own course before social constraints pull her back; and Mrs Grimes in *Death in the Woods*, who is shown to maintain her sense of herself through the abuses of many men until her death. A number of candidates linked stories with an argument about women making themselves independent of men and social expectations; some argued that the writers of their chosen stories suggested that women who seek their own course are punished for it as the strictures of society reassert themselves.
- (b) This was a popular question which attracted some thoughtful and observant answers. Candidates took different attitudes to Namidi, either sympathy or condemnation, but the most successful recognised the ambiguities on Adagha's portrayal. On the one hand, he is presented as greedy and peremptory, ordering his family about and looking 'menacingly' at his wife, but on the other, Adagha shows that his desire for the wealth of the oil is a product of his own sense of poverty and inadequacy – not only is his house constructed of 'rotten bamboo' and 'cowering' roof and walls, but he feels 'diminished' by his inability to afford the 'expensive' fees for the mission school from his 'meagre earnings'. He is impelled by the sight of his home and his son in his 'over-sized knickers'. This costume for Ochuko was often seen as a key part of his characterisation, as well as his energetic 'bouncing', 'humping', 'jumping' and 'reckless abandon', which all create an impression of youthful, energetic innocence. Many candidates also discussed Mama Efe with a sound understanding of Adagha's methods, noting the adjectives 'shrivelled' and 'hardened', which suggest a life of toil and difficulty. It was also often observed that, though she takes a role which is subservient to Namidi, Adagha shows her to be wiser and more thoughtful. It is she who raises the possibility of fire and is 'clouded' by anxiety. Even as she walks with the family towards the oil, she is 'brooding and disturbed.' It was, of course, very important that candidates answering the question knew the story. Those who did not know that Namidi had just found a leaking oil pipe had

limited understanding of the passage. Equally, those who thought that Mama Efe's hellish vision of fire in ll.27-30 was a memory, failed to grasp the point of Adagha's careful foreshadowing of the story's climax. More successful answers explored Adagha's writing in the nightmare vision of fire, including his use of the proleptic word 'funereal'. The description of the procession into the forest also drew some interesting comments, as candidates recognised how it encapsulates the nature of the family and the relationships within it – Namidi 'towering and frowning' in his determined, patriarchal role, the innocent children with their sense of 'adventure' and their doubtful mother bringing up the rear. Some were able to comment that this procession is the last time the family is seen together in the story, and that only Ochuko emerges from the forest, and many noted Adagha's use of the ill-omen of the owl at the end of the passage with its 'doleful note'.

Question 4

Mark Twain: *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

- (a) There were too few responses to this question to make a general comment appropriate.
- (b) There were few responses to this question. Among those, candidates were able to discuss ways in which Twain presents the feud through Huck's innocent perspective, who recounts it in such a matter of fact way that the satirical intent is clear. Some recognised the role of dialogue in the extract, with Huck's probing questions receiving responses from Buck which demonstrate the pointlessness of the feud when nobody can remember the cause, even the 'old folks' who 'do not know, now, what the row was about in the first place.' Examiners saw some thoughtful comments on how Buck's enthusiastic responses emphasise the absurdity of the argument, even celebrating the death of his cousin Bud because he 'stopped and faced around so as to have the bullet holes in front'. This was seen as an effective way of criticising the values of the warring families. The tit for tat violence described in the final paragraph about Bud and 'old Baldy Shepherdson' was seen to present the feud as ridiculous but inescapable. Some candidates wrote about Twain's use of dark humour in this passage and judged that he uses comedy to shock his readers.

Section B: Unseen

Question 5 – Prose

Candidates enjoyed writing about this passage. They often paid close attention to the ways the writer presents the beauty of the courtyard, unpicking the sensory detail and the colours used as well as the rich language suggesting verdant and abundant growth. Confident responses picked out not only visual and tactile descriptions, but the way sibilance creates an onomatopoeic effect with phrases such as 'a swaying mass of trees'. There were interesting readings of the relationship between the natural garden and the man-made buildings, with candidates observing how the former appears to be embracing the latter, and that even things that the reader might not expect to be appealing are made so – the 'velvet green' of the moss, for example. Some candidates suggested that such a colourful and picturesque description is befitting for the home of a painter and suggested that, despite the diminutive adjective 'little', the writer implies he is a successful artist since he lives in such beautiful surroundings. Many answers pointed out the humorous contrast between the ornate beauty of the garden and the incident of falling into the pond, most seeing this as a comic indication of Agnolo's activities. There were some interesting darker readings, however, as candidates noted 'the shadows lengthening' just before he appears from a dark passage covered in 'a mass of green slime'. Individual as these readings were, they did not always take account of Agnolo's stepping 'into the sunshine' and the clear mood of companionable humour between the painter and his daughter. Though the description of Agnolo initially suggests pain and injury with the adjectives the 'torn', 'scratched' and 'perspiring', candidate often noted that the paragraph ends with Agnolo's 'rueful countenance', which suggests a self-aware acceptance of his situation. This is augmented with Graziosa's laughing question, and most responses developed sound discussion of ways in which the writer creates a sense of the warm relationship between father and daughter. Evidence included Agnolo's 'wry' and 'good-humoured' face, his 'smile' and Graziosa's ability to finish his sentence at the end of the passage. Some suggested that the writing suggests that this friendliness and ease between them is extended beyond the family, as the 'wicket' in the entrance archway 'stood always ajar', suggesting welcome to visitors. The passage itself sometimes created conjecture in responses, as candidates often noted that Graziosa's question 'Hast thou been down thy passage again, father?' indicates that the exploration is a frequent event, and that in the latest venture he has reached further than before, reaching 'the other end' and 'a pond'. Some puzzled about his insistence on this exploration, which has caused him pain and anguish, described in ll.35-36. The obsolete language of the dialogue was also noted by some, usually described as 'Shakespearean', and was often used as evidence that the setting is medieval or sixteenth century. One or two suggested that it was a special form of language

adopted by Agnolo and his daughter in playfulness, representing the closeness of their relationship. There was much to discuss in the passage, and it proved to be a good discriminator.

Question 6 – Drama

The drama passage also attracted a large number and a wide range of responses. The most successful clearly wrote about the text as drama, noting the initial stage directions and imagining the action of the scene from the dialogue. It was often treated very seriously, with only a small number recognising any humour or suggesting satire. Some suggested that the names ‘Absurd Person’ and ‘Exacting Customer’ were names given by the shop workers and did not recognise them as character names given by the playwright, which reduce them to particular types for satiric purposes. Some did note, though, that while Elsie, Vera and Phyllis are identified in the script by their first names, the status of the shop manager is indicated by being referred to as ‘Miss Drew’. A pleasingly large number of essays discussed the opening directions carefully, noting the creation of a busy, perhaps slightly ramshackle shop. While the name ‘Chérie et Cie’ suggests pretension with the use of French, candidates noted that this is undermined by the sign hanging ‘upside down’. Many were able to demonstrate how the action and dialogue suggests the shop staff’s increasing desperation to sell some items of clothing. The repeated references to ‘Margot’s’ punctuate the scene, creating comedy and suggesting that Chérie et Cie is constantly failing against its more successful competitor. Candidates who paid close attention to the dialogue found much to discuss, particularly in the exchange between Vera and the Exacting Customer. They noted the customer’s often terse demanding comments, matched to her name, and the skill of Vera’s constant adaptations, always politely accommodating the demands and using the polite address ‘madame’. While there is more of the extract’s characteristic humour in this exchange, thoughtful candidates also saw that it has a serious side, as Vera is always subservient in her keenness to make a sale. Several candidates commented on the stage direction ‘*desperately*’, which accentuates this. This often led essays to consider the challenging working conditions of shop assistants, also highlighted in the ‘*undertone*’ exchange between Phyllis and Elsie, with its accompanying adverb ‘*wearily*’. Miss Drew adds to this with her rebuke to Elsie that she has let a ‘third’ customer ‘slip through (her) fingers’ and it was noted that Phyllis moves ‘*her back as though it were aching*’. A few candidates picked up that the references to the slow passing of time in ll.40-43 are reinforced by the presence of a ‘*small clock*’ in the set design. The strongest and most successful answers were based on very close observation of the writing of the passage and an appreciation of its dramatic potential. They recognised both the playwright’s use of humour and the more serious points being made about the challenges of consumer retail and working conditions.

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Key messages

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General comments

Readers should note that this paper is taken by only a small number of candidates. Examiners may not have seen a full range of answers on the texts studied; and some texts may have only been studied by one or two small centres.

With this component the key discriminator for the higher levels of the mark scheme is often the way in which a candidate responds to the text as a play that might be performed. It follows, therefore, that discussions of ellipsis, punctuation and exclamation marks need to be framed in terms of how they influence the way that an actor might deliver the lines on stage. Similarly, if there are stage directions given in an extract, they are often worthy of comment as a means of gaining access to the ‘dramatic effects’ often asked for in the question.

With **(a)** type questions, responses need to focus the question onto specific moments in the play’s action. There should be close reference to particulars throughout, even though the question is framed in a general way. It follows, therefore, that a response does not have to be comprehensive; rather, the candidate should select moments that are particularly pertinent to the question given. At the lower end, responses often depend on narrative and paraphrase. In higher performing responses there is close reference to text and a strong sense of a developing argument, where every paragraph contributes something to an over-arching discussion. Candidates need to be careful to ensure that they stay on task throughout: some answers were very much marred by lengthy digression or by an inability to work to a plan. Centres may find it useful to spend time with candidates talking about the specific requirements that are suggested by the expressions ‘dramatic significance’, ‘dramatic effects’ and ‘dramatic presentation’, as these are often the triggers for higher level performance, the step up from the ‘How’ or ‘In what ways’ that often start a question.

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A number of candidates appeared to have only a limited notion of context which is an element of **AO1 Knowledge and Understanding**. In **(b)** type responses the most straightforward, type of context is for candidates to show a sense of where the scene fits into the action of the play as a whole. Another simple example would be background information about the writer or about the times in which the play was written. However, better performing candidates ensure that the contextual information given actually contributes to the arguments that they want to make. The question then is: ‘how does contextual knowledge help shape my understanding of this text?’ Thus, for example, knowledge about Venice as a mercantile centre is only useful if a candidate explains (and if it is relevant to the question) that the language and action of *The Merchant of Venice* bear witness to the importance of trade, bonds and wealth throughout.

AO5 Evaluation of opinions was problematic for some candidates this session, as it has been in the past.

Candidates studying literature at an Advanced Level are expected to demonstrate that they have read round the text and understand that a literary text might be variously interpreted. In practical terms, this means more than simply mentioning a critic or school of thought (Feminist and Marxist criticism are often alluded to). Candidates need to demonstrate that what they have read has deepened their understanding of a text, either by providing a point of disagreement or by enabling them to move deeper with the convictions about the play that they already have. It may be that reference to a film or to a production seen serves the same purpose. Of course, less convincing responses may do it in the simplest of terms ('Another interpretation of this moment might be...'); but the best responses will use the opinions of others to demonstrate the complexity of reading a literary text in detail. In sum, AO5 must be an integrated and relevant element of a response, not a dutiful bolt-on. Leonard Bernstein once wrote that: 'A work of art does not answer questions, it provokes them; and its essential meaning is in the tension between the contradictory answers.' It is exploration of this sort of tension that provokes the most meaningful responses to AO5.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Shakespeare

Question 1

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *The Merchant of Venice*

- (a) Contracts and bonds are central to both the scenes set in Venice and those in Belmont. Responses were quick to acknowledge the links across the two plot lines, and there was often useful comparison. Most candidates were able to see that legal and moral obligation are interrogated in the play because Portia carefully influences her suitors in their choice of casket in order to ensure the outcome from the bond to her father's will that she wants; similarly, in the other part of the play the law of Venice is subverted to ensure the outcome that the Christians require. Responses performing at the lower levels tended towards the narrative, with an account given of the various contracts made. Better answers were able to illustrate the issue with convincing discussions of textual detail, thus demonstrating response to the question's instruction to consider the 'dramatic significance' of the issues raised by the plot.
- (b) Nearly all candidates were able to locate the passage within the context of the play. Many responses warmed quickly to the exaggerations and hyperbole of Portia's speech; a few recognised that some of this comes from her relief at not having to marry either of the other courtiers. Responses took Portia's love to be sincere and humble ('You see me, Lord Bassanio, where I stand/Such as I am'). They were not, however, willing to grant Bassanio's speech the same sincerity, with the majority of candidates seeing Bassanio simply as insincere, a gold-digger. There was much focus, therefore, on the ring and on Bassanio's later betrayal of his bond to Portia. This response is, of course, a possible interpretation. However, many candidates simply ignored the latter part of the passage, the conversation between Gratiano and Bassanio, despite the evidence it offers that Bassanio is not insincere in his stated love of Portia. Both Gratiano and Nerissa's statements add another perspective to our understanding of the relationship between the major characters, and Bassanio's 'And do you, Gratiano, mean good faith?' arguably applies to himself too. Evidence like this suggests that when an audience reaches the ring scene, there is a realisation that Bassanio is acting of a sense of sudden relief for his friend Antonio, not out of a studied and intended disloyalty to Portia. Few candidates recognised that at the end we are asked to accept that Portia and Bassanio's marriage will be the stronger for the test that it has undergone. On the whole, candidates tended to move to whole play issues too quickly, rather than placing the passage as the central focus of their discussion. There was sometimes useful contextual discussion about the world of the play as being one where contracts and bonds are central, with the best candidates pointing out that Portia's language is couched in terms of finance and interest ('ten thousand times more rich'; 'the full sum of me').

Question 2

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *King Lear*

- (a) Too few responses to comment.
- (b) Too few responses to comment.

Section B: Drama

Question 3

ATHOL FUGARD: *The Train Driver and Other Plays*

- (a) Too few responses to comment.
- (b) Too few responses to comment.

Question 4

SHELAGH STEPHENSON: *An Experiment with an Air Pump*

- (a) Too few responses to comment.
- (b) Too few responses to comment.

Question 5

TOM STOPPARD: *Indian Ink*

- (a) Responses to this question usually showed a firm understanding of the context of the play, that of the British empire. Discussion often focused on the different time periods of the text, the play's structure, as a means of focusing the issue. Moments from the 1980s sections were often adduced as a means of demonstrating that, though Mrs Swann has not really moved on in her opinions, modern India now sees her attitudes as antiquated. There was much discussion of the ways in which Mrs Swann uses cake as a means of silencing dissent in her discussions with Anish. Less well done was the treatment of the passages set in the 1930s. The best candidates were able to see and demonstrate that the British hegemony was already breaking down, with Flora's behaviour and attitudes already interrogating the rigidities of the Jummapur Club and the colonial Civil Service as represented by Durance. There was sometimes useful reference to scenes where Flora is seen to treat Das as an equal. Weaker responses tended to assert; stronger responses looked closely at particular moments, supporting points by close reference to the text.
- (b) A number of candidates wrote general essays about the play, rather than focusing on the extract provided. Better responses were able to see that explorations of the past in the play involve the discovery of documentary or pictorial evidence (as Anish describes here), or discussion with witnesses. The best responses were also able to see that the main focus of the passage is on the various ways that the past can be differently interpreted, with Anish seeing Empire Day as a celebration of oppression, whilst Mrs Swan sees it simply as 'Queen Victoria's birthday'. Similarly, the portrait of Flora can be seen in different ways, something that Mrs Swan wants to deny with her 'Codswallop' in line 49. Candidates often made connections to the wider play, with the parallels between this scene and the intimate scenes between Flora and Nirad a popular focus. Some candidates also discussed Pike and the inadequacies of his methods for gaining an understanding of the past.

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Comments on specific questions

Section A: Shakespeare

Question 1

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *The Merchant of Venice*

- (a) The best candidates identified clear examples of the law's representatives in the play and explored how they demonstrated the distinction between law and justice, or the tensions between Shylock's emphasis on law and Portia's on mercy, linking their knowledge and understanding of contextual factors such as anti-Semitism, mercenary attitudes, or the restrictions faced by women in the sixteenth century with carefully explored evidence of them in the play, such as the Duke's bias in the trial or Portia's ruthlessness with Shylock. Other people's opinions often included effective contrasts between contemporary reaction to the treatment of Shylock and an evaluation of evidence which would make a twenty-first century audience uncomfortable. Less successful responses often relied on narrative or paraphrase. Even some better performing responses lacked the substantiating quotations which are required to accurately argue the points being made.
- (b) Very good answers achieved an excellent balance between Shakespeare's portrayal of the Prince of Aragon and the responses of Portia in the given passage, and their implications for the rest of the play. These responses explored concepts such as the limitations imposed on women, the controlling influence of fathers, or the materialism or hypocrisy of different characters here and elsewhere in the play. Less good responses tended to focus exclusively on contrasts between this and the earlier scene with the Prince of Morocco and the later scene with Bassanio, without looking much beyond them. Some responses relied on narrative or on exhaustive chronological exploration of the passage itself, without really looking beyond it. Some candidates tended to focus on attempting to analyse every detail of form, structure, or rhyme scheme but did not demonstrate any awareness of how it contributed to meaning.

Question 2

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *King Lear*

- (a) The question invited candidates to explore different interpretations of the play through contrasting physical or metaphorical blindness, with particular focus on Lear and Gloucester. The best candidates could explore and evaluate how each man was shown to gain insight or vision through madness or literal blindness and explore and evaluate the evidence which showed that. Less good responses again roamed more widely around the characters and suggested (convincingly) that almost everyone in the play suffers from some sort of self-limiting blindness. However, such breadth often meant that the responses were general in nature, sacrificing detailed exploration as a result of this choice. Responses at the lower end often relied on narrative, with some confusion of characters or the order of events.
- (b) The best candidates here were able to locate the passage clearly in the play and explore the different ways in which the other characters showed loyalty to Lear, given both his state of mind and his predicament at this particular point in the play. They were able to use contextual knowledge and understanding to good effect by contrasting the role of the Fool here and elsewhere, with the feudal loyalty shown by Kent or Gloucester, and they were also able to recognise evidence of

changes in Lear's attitude to those around him and its significance. The very best candidates were able to respond to the tone of the scene, the gentle humanity ('your Grace', 'Good my lord') with which the Fool, Edgar, Gloucester and Kent respond to Lear, his needs, and his madness, irrespective of their former, more social determined relationship. Less able responses often confused the order of events in the play, particularly when it came to the role of Edgar in this passage. Some responses at the lower end confused the characters and attempted to answer the question by simply narrating what happens in the passage, with little understanding of its meaning here, or its implications for the rest of the play. A number of candidates wrote about loyalty in the play in general, with no particular reference to the passage given.

Section B: Drama

Question 3

ATHOL FUGARD: *The Train Driver and Other Plays*

- (a) Answers to this question on the dramatic presentation of relationships between men and women focused, naturally, on Roelf and his wife, Alfred and Veronica, and Solly and Rachel. Most candidates were able to range across the three plays. All of these were legitimate focuses. Only a few candidates chose to explore Roelf's relationship with the dead Red Doek, which is the central relationship in *The Train Driver*, even though one of the characters is dead. Similarly, the relationship between Henry and Adela in *Have You Seen Us?* was rarely mentioned, despite being the dramatic focus of much of the play. On the whole, contexts of anti-semitism or of apartheid in South Africa were well understood.
- (b) Many responses to this question on Fugard's use of monologues as a dramatic technique simply focused on the passage presented, often giving a narrative account of what was said. Contexts were not often given and there was not much awareness of how monologues might be interpreted in different ways. The best responses dealt with the issue as asked, seeing how a monologue is a means for a character to reveal something about themselves to an audience, how much of what is said might be self-delusion or, in this case, a desire to put the best possible light on how one has behaved wrongly ('It was the devil what made me take it', 'he made me believe in it also') in order to avoid personal responsibility. Here, and elsewhere in the plays, monologue is also used as a means of evoking the past and of using it to explain the present. Uninterrupted, the speaker reveals more about himself than he perhaps intends. The best answers were able to range across the other plays too, with reference often made to Roelf's lengthy monologues in *The Train Driver* or Henry's guilt-ridden monologues in *Have You Seen Us?* Very few responses noted that Henry's monologues open and close *Have You Seen Us?*, a deliberate framing device on Fugard's part, and a contrast with the other two plays.

Question 4

SHELAGH STEPHENSON: *An Experiment with an Air Pump*

- (a) The most able responses established clear contrasts and comparisons between the two marriages in the play, linking them with their contrasting contexts and the ways in which Stephenson brought these out, as well as considering how Harriet and Maria were also used to demonstrate contrasting attitudes to marriage and expectations of men and women in 1799. The best candidates were able to evaluate how far relationships between men and women were shown to have changed between the two time periods.
- (b) The best candidates were able to draw detailed parallels between Ellen and Fenwick, and Phil and Isobel, and explore concepts such as the contrasting values attributed to material objects and human beings, or the differing priorities of scientists in both time scales. The best candidates often commented on the significance of the ways in which the roles are doubled in performance. Less good candidates often confused Phil and Tom, or misunderstood Phil's role in relation to the house, and made no comparisons between the passage and the characters in 1799. There were some answers that avoided the issue of class altogether, simply talking about changing roles of women or writing in general about the play. A few responses at the very top were able to contrast Ellen's worried middle-class preoccupations with Phil's more down-to-earth view (and more earthy language in line 38) of how the working classes have been exploited, both in modern times and, with mention of Isobel in the other time frame of the play. Little was made of Phil's confusion about Ellen not being a medical doctor.

Question 5

TOM STOPPARD: *Indian Ink*

- (a) The best responses linked writing, painting and drawing not only with their significance for Flora and Nira Das but also with the roles they play in revealing changing attitudes to nationalism or colonialism, and the clues they provide for the characters in the 1980s. Many candidates drew attention to Flora's poetry as portraying a rose-tinted view of India. Others were able to explore the significance of the mixed medium portrait of Flora, the basis for discussion between Mrs Swan and Anish in Act 2. There was sometimes discussion, too, of Pike and the limitations of his sort of biographical writing, the source of much of Stoppard's satire and humour in the play. A few candidates chose to explore some of the literary references in the play and their relevance to the play as a whole. This was a fertile area for discussion. Less able candidates tended to focus exclusively on painting and writing only in relation to Das and Flora, where the discussions about art were mainly seen as a cover for the pair's growing feelings for one another. Responses performing at the lower end tended to list examples of writing and nude paintings of Flora without really exploring their relevance or dramatic effects.
- (b) The responses at the upper end of the mark scheme explored contrasts and similarities between the club in its two separate time periods seeing that part of the skill of the scene lies in presenting both at the same time, with Pike's attendance at the club framing the presentation of the episode from the 1930s. Most responses recognised how Stoppard is demonstrating the lasting impact of British Imperialism in the extract and this was linked with the evidence of that impact on Nirad Das or Dilip, or by reference to Eleanor's defence of English mores and values to Anish elsewhere in the play. There were some interesting discussions about the literary references (Virgil and Kipling, for example) and their significance as a dramatic device in the extract and in the play as a whole. Less good answers made little mention of Stoppard's methods and neglected Dilip and Pike, thus ignoring the last 18 lines of the passage, which demonstrate that although the times have changed, the club still clings to the British inheritance of dressing properly in jacket and tie. Answers at the lower end sometimes confused British and Indian characters. A number of responses suggested the Resident was Indian for example.

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Section A: Shakespeare

Question 1

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *The Merchant of Venice*

- (a) The question asked candidates to compare the relationship between Antonio and Bassanio with that of Portia and Nerissa. At the lower end, candidates often simply gave an account of both relationships, with little comparison. Better responses were able to deal with the fact that the relationship between Antonio and Bassanio is between equals, whereas Portia and Nerissa's relationship is of servant and mistress. The best responses saw that ironically the notionally most imbalanced relationship – that of the women – was the more functional, whilst that of the men was actually transactional and flawed. There was often speculation about whether Antonio and Bassanio's love for each other is sexual, a point which was rarely supported by convincing evidence. There was much admiration for the practicality and honesty of the relationship between Portia and Nerissa.
- (b) Responses were quick to see that the extract provided supplies our first understanding of the situation in which Antonio finds himself. Some responses simply gave an account of what happens, whilst better answers discussed the presentation of Venice and its values too. The most ambitious candidates viewed the passage as being full of foreshadowing about – for example – the fickleness of fortune in both plots of the play. These candidates were able to make close reference to the passage and see that the constant metaphors taken from trade and from the sea are intrinsic to the play as a whole. Many responses used Solanio and Salerio's speeches as a means of highlighting the treacherous, unstable nature of appearance and reality and as a means to move outwards to other scenes where these ideas are explored.

Question 2

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *King Lear*

- (a) Candidates appeared to find the question about Lear as a king both interesting and challenging. They were able to see how Lear abuses his role and power early on in the play, only to come to a fuller understanding of what it means to rule when all power has deserted him. There were interesting explorations of Lear's arrogance, his lack of self-knowledge in the early scenes, and these were often linked to the scenes on the heath where his madness reveals a nobility (and a king-like understanding of others) which is absent earlier on. One or two very good answers focused on those who surround King Lear in the later scenes and see him as worthy of their loyalty despite his loss of power. Less able responses tended to focus on the early scenes at the expense of the rest of the play.
- (b) The best candidates explored both the passage and play as a whole in relation to relevant concepts such as 'natural' bonds and the ties between parent and child, and king and subject. They were able to explore how Cordelia or Kent's speeches here prepare the audience for their later choices and actions, as well as the ways in which this scene in general determines later events. Less good responses did not look beyond the passage and the answers showed little

understanding of anything except the fact that Lear got angry, with little attention paid to what he actually says at this point. More sensitive responses were able to register his mistaken hurt and the spite with which he exiles Cordelia. Oddly, there was little said about Kent's last speech which attempts to reconcile before being cut off by Lear. Similarly, much more could have been made of the foreshadowing contained in Lear's final line: 'The bow is bent and drawn; make from the shaft.'

Section B: Drama

Question 3

ATHOL FUGARD: *The Train Driver and Other Plays*

- (a) Most responses focused on the most obvious example, the action of *The Train Driver* and Roelf's tortured coming to terms with his innocent involvement in the death of Red Doek. Reaching across the plays, candidates also dealt with the deaths and attitudes to death in *Coming Home*. Most candidates displayed clear understanding of the context of apartheid in South Africa.
- (b) Most responses were able to give an account of the scene and see that Henry's prejudices are being interrogated and undermined here. The best responses were able to characterise Henry's growing awareness of Solly as having a back story and feelings. Some good answers were able to use action from the scene ('HENRY *pushes his sandwich aside ...*') to demonstrate his discomfort. A limitation of some answers centred on a failure to make links with other plays. It is important that candidates deal with *all* aspects of the question asked. Answers that did range more widely usually did so by comparing Henry, Roelf and Alfred and exploring how far each of them is able to find redemption during the course of their play.

Question 4

SHELAGH STEPHENSON: *An Experiment with an Air Pump*

- (a) Responses indicated some confusion about gender and social class, with some candidates using the terms interchangeably thus implying that they mean the same thing. The best responses focused on Isobel and Phil and on the way in which attitudes towards the working class have changed. Connections between the two timelines were often made quite constructively showing concern about the effect of scientific progress on the common man. Not many of the answers were really able to locate the discussions in particular moments in the play, and this tendency towards generality tended to keep the marks at the lower end of the scale. The best answers were clear, detailed and in full command of both text and question.
- (b) Responses to this question responded to the theatricality of the scene. Not many candidates recognised that Roget and Armstrong's cynical discussion about Isobel is actually overheard by her. There was much discussion of Armstrong's rather perverted view of science and his willingness to play with another's emotions for scientific purposes. Only a few responses then continued to talk about this incident as the principal motivation for Isobel's suicide, despite Isobel's stifled cry at line 51. Roget was generally seen as a sympathetic character who recognises Armstrong's unscrupulousness. The best responses were able to make links to the rest of the play, often seeing links between Isobel's death and the death portrayed in Joseph Wright's picture. These discussions often led to further examination of ideas about science as amoral, a theme which runs through both the 18th and 20th century scenes of the play.

Question 5

TOM STOPPARD: *Indian Ink*

- (a) A small number of candidates tackled the question about contrasts of place. They were mostly able to see that the scenes set in India create an atmosphere and raise issues of empire that are then seen from a different point of view from the 1980s, with the advantage of hindsight. The airy freedom of the outdoor scenes with Flora and Das were seen as a strong contrast to the claustrophobic atmosphere of Mrs Swan's London home.
- (b) The best answers here explored the changes in Das evident in the passage and how they foreshadow his later nationalism. They also questioned and contrasted Flora's attempts to influence him with Eleanor's exchanges with Anish elsewhere in the play. They were also able to

explore the texture of the scene and the uneasy rapport between Flora and Das, where the slightly stilted conversation stands in for a completely different and more personal agenda. There were some interesting observations about Flora's imperfect understanding of the impact of empire on India, and the complexity of the relationship between the two countries. Less good responses explored the extract purely in terms of a developing love affair, with little attention to the detail of the passage.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/41

Pre- and Post-1900 Poetry and Prose

Key messages

- Close attention to the focus and detail of the question is key to a relevant, successful response.
- When answering passage-based questions, the detail of the text must be central to the answer.
- Evaluation of other opinions and interpretations should support the central argument of the answer.

General comments

It is important to note that this paper is taken by only a small number of candidates in the November series. Examiners are unlikely to have seen a full range of answers on the texts studied and some texts may have only been studied by one or two small centres.

It was very pleasing to see positive and relevant personal engagement with the texts studied. The vast majority of answers reflected careful study and enjoyment of the poetry and prose. Rubric infringements are rare, but still in evidence and it is vital that centres check that their candidates are studying one poetry text and one prose text from the syllabus. One of these must be pre-1900 and one post-1900. There are still examples of scripts where candidates have written about Jane Austen's *Persuasion* and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* or Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

Knowledge and understanding underpin successful approaches to the paper and the way in which they are applied to questions and used in the time available is a key indicator of success. Knowledge can include purposeful reference to the context of the text being studied and some good examples of its use were seen in the course of marking. It is important to be aware that there is a difference between background knowledge and context. Essentially, background knowledge relates to biographical details or anecdotes about a writer or the times in which they wrote that does not necessarily illuminate an argument about the text. Contextual comment may relate to the historical, social, cultural or literary nature of the text which may incorporate details of the writer's life but should be focused on supporting the key terms of the question. For example, explaining that Emily Dickinson lived in Massachusetts is a piece of background information. On the other hand, considering how her hometown of Amhurst inspired her interest in nature which features so prominently in her work, and supported her intellectual life, is contextual. Use of material is dependent on the question and a number of candidates still compromise their success by indiscriminately trying to include everything they know. Selection of points to use is paramount.

Analysis is best when laser-focused on the detail of the text, relevant to the question and developed with personal interpretation. Less successful answers tend to generalise discussion of effects or consider them without exemplification. For example, listing technical terminology without providing examples or details of effects on the reader. Comments such as, 'The poet uses metaphors, alliteration, rhyme, juxtaposition and similes in their writing' are unhelpful. It is much better to select an example of an effect and explore its use in the context of the question and a writer's ideas and style. Genre is also a key discriminator in terms of candidates understanding how the nature of a text is crucial to its meaning and critical reception. Candidates should be aware, for example that poems are not organised in paragraphs. Understanding of the nature and use of literary techniques is important in reaching higher levels of achievement. Candidates should use terminology accurately and with relevance, avoiding blunt, catch-all approaches. It is fine to refer to 'diction' and 'juxtaposition' where appropriate, but important to avoid using them as blunt tools to attempt exploration of lexical choices and contrast.

In terms of **(a)** style questions, responses need to focus the question onto specific episodes and moments in the texts. There should be close reference to detail throughout, even though the question has an overarching focus. While examiners do not expect a response to be comprehensive, they do want the candidate to select aspects of texts that are apposite to the question. In the lower levels of the mark scheme, responses tend to rely on narrative and paraphrase. Higher level answers demonstrate focused arguments with specific and relevant illustration and a sense of developing overview as discussion progresses. Some candidates drift from the question, a situation that can be resolved through careful planning and active proofreading. Overly long answers are particularly prone to digression, and it is important that candidates do not approach the exam with a view that writing as much as possible is their overarching goal. Spending some time breaking down a question is a good use of time in the exam and leads to a much more tightly focused answer.

With **(b)** style questions, candidates must make the passage or poem provided the main focus of their answer. Selecting detail from the passage and exploring this in terms of the question focus is key to producing a salient and successful answer. Alongside this, candidates should refer to the wider text or poems in a selection, but they must prioritise discussing the passage or poem printed in the exam. At the lower levels, this often takes the form of working through the text methodically, sometimes relying on narration with an almost incidental application of argument. More successful answers approach the question strategically with detailed and insightful analysis.

Personal response and evaluation of varying interpretations appear as two different assessment objectives in the mark scheme but can work in tandem to support coherent arguments. Personal response is most effective when linked to analysis and a train of thought pertaining to the terms of the question. Some good examples were seen of candidates linking elements of their personal response to the views of critics or alternative readings. This avoided the situation where evaluation of varying opinions is tacked on to essays, or incongruous in the line of argument presented. Use of secondary sources was excellent in some responses but represented a distraction in others or was barely in evidence – a feast or famine situation where imbalance could compromise achievement. Some candidates do not engage with Assessment Objective 5 at all, and it is important to address this. At A level, candidates should be able to take a multi-dimensional view of text. This can be done successfully in a number of ways, including relevant reference to critical approaches such as Marxist or feminist views and using comments made by individual, named critics. Candidates can also articulate the existence of other possible interpretations, for example by exploring one idea and then commenting 'on the other hand'. Use of modal auxiliary verbs to convey the idea of a range of possible views can work well but should offer clarification of different opinions. Reference to a film production or review can also work effectively. Overall, use of personal response and evaluation of other opinions should be integrated into discussion.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Pre-1900 Poetry and Prose

Question 1

JANE AUSTEN: *Persuasion*

- (a)** There were too few responses to comment.
- (b)** There were too few responses to comment.

Question 2

GEOFFREY CHAUCER: *The Merchant's Prologue and Tale*

- (a)** This question required candidates to explore ways in which Chaucer presents different attitudes to sexual relationships in the tale. This was a popular question with most answers meeting Level 3 or Level 4 criteria. Chaucer's use of lust as a driving force behind relationships was considered through characterisation of January, May and Damien and their interactions. Some brought in Pluto and Proserpina too. Often candidates made the judgement that sexual desire is not a foundation for a lasting relationship, and some found it difficult to draw a distinction between marital and sexual relationships. Some answers relied on a formulaic structure driven by narrative rather than selecting points that drove arguments. The least successful answers struggled to provide specific supporting detail, leading to general observations. Better answers offered some analytical insights,

for example in terms of fruit and garden imagery connected to nature and the Bible where parallels were drawn with Adam and Eve, the fall from grace and the Garden of Eden.

- (b) This question required candidates to discuss an extract from the tale, paying close attention to Chaucer's poetic methods. This question was very popular with most candidates achieving marks between Level 2 and Level 4. Better responses dealt with aspects of Chaucer's language and techniques, including topics such as misogyny, medieval views of women and background information about Chaucer and the tales in general. Less successful answers diverted quickly from focus on the passage to more general, unsupported discussion of January's marriage. Some tracked through the passage, offering contemporary translations of Justinus's advice and attitudes, some of which suffered from misunderstanding and mistranslation. An example of this is a view that marriage is an easy route to heaven with some interpreting line 17 as referring to the prospective wife as a goddess. Very few answers offered an in-depth analysis of the passage and its presentation of marriage.

Question 3

EMILY DICKINSON: Selected Poems

- (a) There were too few responses to comment.
- (b) There were too few responses to comment.

Question 4

JOHN DONNE: Selected Poems

- (a) There were too few responses to comment.
- (b) There were too few responses to comment.

Question 5

THOMAS HARDY: *Far from the Madding Crowd*

- (a) This question required candidates to consider how Hardy shapes a reader's response to Farmer Boldwood in the novel. Several responses were seen. Achievement tended to range between Level 2 and Level 4 with the least successful answers relying on narrative approaches with little handling of Hardy's characterisation of Boldwood. Better answers demonstrated sound knowledge and were able to range across the text, discussing his relationship with Bathsheba and comparing him with other contenders for Bathsheba's affections. Use of supporting detail varied. Some answers argued that he is obsessive but also placed blame on Bathsheba for eliciting his attention. One or two answers commented on the meaning of his name, exploring the use of Bold and commenting on the significance of trees.
- (b) This question required candidates to analyse a passage from Chapter 6 of the novel, paying close attention to language, tone and narrative methods. Several responses were seen. As in the (a) question, answers tended to range between Level 2 and Level 4. Better answers discussed the working of fate in bringing about the meeting with Bathsheba at a crucial moment, commenting on Hardy's narrative style. There was also some useful discussion identifying Oak as level-headed and good-natured as well as a leader of men. Less successful answers featured some repetition of ideas with little analysis of the detail of language. Some made insufficient reference to wider reference to the novel as a whole, but a few mentioned the rejected proposal and loss of the farm.

Question 6

BRAM STOKER: *Dracula*

- (a) There were too few responses to comment.
- (b) There were too few responses to comment.

Section B: Post-1900 Poetry and Prose

Question 7

MARGARET ATWOOD: *The Handmaid's Tale*

- (a) This question required candidates to discuss how Atwood presents the relationship between Offred and Moira. There were several answers to this question, but it was not as popular as the (b) question. Less successful answers offered partially secure, and sometimes fragmented, accounts of the relationship between the two women, exploring the contrast between them, the more rebellious Moira against a passive Offred, many referring to the escape attempt. Stronger responses discussed how the contrast between Offred and Moira was more nuanced with Offred gradually adopting more resistant strategies and Moira becoming more compliant. One very good answer considered the loss of identity and humanity in relation to the two women.
- (b) This question required candidates to analyse the effects of a passage from Chapter 40 of the novel. This was a very popular question with many responses seen. Less successful answers struggled to understand the opening as imaginary and missed opportunities to analyse the significance of the fantasy sequence. The least convincing relied extensively on paraphrase and general discussion of the plot. Some candidates were unfamiliar with characters such as Serena Joy and Nick, a few thinking he was the Commander. Better answers demonstrated a good sense of structure and focused on Atwood's concerns, analysing key details and exploring the wider text in relation to their arguments. Although most responses met Level 3 or Level 4 criteria, several answers extended their analysis with discussions around unreliable narration and the use of dialogue suggesting a romantic past that is lost but still yearned for.

Question 8

SUJATA BHATT: Selected Poems from *Point No Point*

- (a) There were too few responses to comment.
- (b) There were too few responses to comment.

Question 9

JAMES JOYCE: *Dubliners*

- (a) There were too few responses to comment.
- (b) There were too few responses to comment.

Question 10

JACKIE KAY: Selected Poems from *Darling*

- (a) This question required candidates to compare some of the ways in which Kay presents mothers in three poems from the selection. Very few answers were seen. Most met criteria for Level 3 or Level 4 with straightforward and sound exploration of appropriate poems. The overall view was that Kay has a negative attitude towards mothers. Knowledge and understanding tended to be secure but analysis of effects was patchier with some candidates taking a sociological viewpoint that was not always focused on poetic methods.
- (b) This question required candidates to write a critical appreciation of the poem, *Church Invisible*, considering in what ways it is characteristic of Kay's poetic methods and concerns. A few answers were seen, and this question was more popular than the (a) option on this text. Most were quite well-handled with evidence of clear understanding and engaged personal response. A couple of answers extended the discussion to Kay's other poems dealing with abuse. It was evident from answers that candidates found Kay's language, themes and style accessible and were able to respond with understanding, personal views and sometimes insight.

Question 11

JEAN RHYS: *Wide Sargasso Sea*

- (a) There were too few responses to comment.
- (b) There were too few responses to comment.

Question 12

STEPHEN SPENDER: Selected Poems

- (a) There were too few responses to comment.
- (b) There were too few responses to comment.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/42
Pre- and Post-1900 Poetry and Prose

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Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

JANE AUSTEN: Persuasion

- (a)** This question required candidates to write about Austen’s presentation of Anne Elliot in the light of a given quotation. This was a popular question and answers reflected the full range of marks. Less secure answers used it as an opportunity to write everything they knew about Anne with little consideration of the quotation. General approaches read as character studies describing Anne’s qualities of good sense and kindness and how various characters valued or treated her dismissively. There were a few responses that looked carefully at the quotation, understood the phrase ‘retentive feelings’ and looked for evidence of Anne’s attachment to Captain Wentworth. They were successful because they focused on key elements in the text: examples of her hyper-awareness of his presence and the gradual changes in his treatment of her; her delight in the suspicion of his jealousy and reception of his letter, as well as Anne’s sensitivity to her family’s behaviour towards him, her claim to Captain Harville of women ‘loving longest...when hope is gone’ and her reflections on the issue of persuasion.
- (b)** This question required candidates to discuss a passage from Volume 1 Chapter 12, paying close attention to language, tone and narrative methods. This was the more popular option and generally better executed. Most responses delved into the significance of the passage to the overall novel, showing varying degrees of sophistication. They acknowledged that this was the moment when Captain Wentworth witnessed Anne’s confidence and capability in a distressing and challenging

situation, while he and others were unsure of what to do. Many went on to explain how this event prompted a reassessment of Anne in his eyes, leading him to declare his love for her, although some did not.

The most insightful discussions appreciated Austen's use of irony by briefly connecting this scene with Wentworth's praise of Louisa for her 'decisiveness and firmness' on the Winthrop walk. They noted how Louisa's fall ironically resulted from her impulsive behaviour which disregarded Wentworth's advice. Furthermore, they analysed Austen's language, sentence structure, and tone in describing Louisa's actions and explored contrasting reactions to the incident. This included examining the implications behind phrases such as 'Everyone capable of thinking'. Some comments focused on Austen's ability to create a sense of panic, while a few felt it was overly dramatic or even viewed it as social satire – an exposé of superficial behaviour among the upper classes – although these interpretations lacked sufficient context regarding its significance for readers' understanding of Anne's relationship with Captain Wentworth.

Less successful responses centred solely on analysing the passage to showcase how Austen presents Anne at this pivotal moment by emphasising the contrast between her character traits compared with those of Mary.

Question 2

GEOFFREY CHAUCER: *The Merchant's Prologue and Tale*

- (a) The question invited candidates to explore conflicts between the young and the old in the poem. A popular question, many connections were made between old age and winter and youth and spring. Those with secure knowledge of the text did well. Most candidates based their arguments on the conflict that came about as a result of the age gap, but some candidates included the wider philosophical conflicts and expectations to produce more sophisticated and comprehensive responses. These more informed responses drew attention to the social and literary contexts of Chaucer's Tales and explained that modern readers might be more sympathetic to the young lovers but that then, the Tale would be read in the literary traditions of misogynist writing, courtly love and the crude farce of the fabliau. The best answers considered a feminist perspective, discussed the role of the Merchant and his experience of marriage in the presentation of the story, compared the descriptions of January as a stubborn, lustful old man with the sexual passion of the young lovers and how the interference of Pluto and Proserpina contributed to May's victory and her warning that January's eyes may well continue to deceive him. Less successful responses retold the story of May and January with occasional comments on their problems, but often without mentioning conflicts or distinguishing between the problems of men and women or the young and the old. A few used a Marxist perspective to comment on the relative social statuses of January and Damian in terms of age, wealth and power, and showed how the language used made May into a commodity, reading her affair with Damian as an attempt to revolt against the economic and religious norms of the times.
- (b) This question was not as popular as 2(a) but nevertheless attracted a number of answers. It required candidates to discuss an extract from the Tale, paying close attention to Chaucer's poetic methods. Less successful answers offered sparse analysis of the passage and instead veered into narrative accounts of the plot and simple explanations of character. Some candidates confused Justinus and Placebo. Better answers showed good understanding of relationships between Justinus and his wife and the nature of marriage in contextual terms. Many wrote about fabliau with variable success and relevance. More assured answers used apt details and were clear on the immediate context and Justinus's role in the debate on marriage, commenting on the similarity between his account of his marriage with the Merchant's in the Prologue and the Host's response at the end. They also appreciated the irony of 'childe pley', linked it to '-ye been a man of age- and the way the youthful May plays or deceives Januarie in the scene in the garden. The best responses selected examples judiciously to exemplify Chaucer's creation of a sense of the spoken voice arguing a point of view: the rhythm in the address to Placebo, the reference to Seneca, the use of asides and repetition of phrases like 'God woot' and the emphatic effect of particular pairs of rhymes.

Question 3

EMILY DICKINSON: *Selected Poems*

- (a) This question was much less popular than the (b) option on Dickinson. The question invited candidates to consider how far and in what ways Dickinson 'explores disturbing ideas arising from

everyday situations'. Answers were either well done or struggled to find relevant material to use to answer the question. Little was seen in the middle of the mark range. Selecting three poems seemed to be the source of most problems with the question and it is important that candidates are given opportunities to practise exploring which poems go with different questions and ideas. Two of the most successful poems used were *What Mystery Pervades a Well!* and *I dreaded that first Robin, so*. Some answers used this as an opportunity to write about the background and context of Dickinson's life with variable success. The best responses selected appropriate everyday situations such as walking in the garden and aspects of the natural world to develop insightful analytical responses with some effective references to evaluation of different interpretations.

- (b) This question was one of the most popular on the paper and attracted a large number of responses. The question required candidates to discuss the poem '*Hope is the thing with feathers* —, considering poetic methods and how it adds to understanding of Dickinson's concerns elsewhere in the selection. The full range of achievement was seen. Some struggled to understand the concept of hope and its relationship to a bird while others grasped the central concept but swiftly relapsed into repetition. There was some misunderstanding in weaker answers, particularly in terms of the last two lines of the poem. The least successful answers offered general responses that did not go beyond attempts to engage personally with the meaning of the poem. Some answers worked through the poem methodically, selecting details and relating these to a sense of the poem's central argument. Across the ability range, a significant number of answers lacked reference to the wider selection, thereby restricting the marks available to them. Wider context led some to consider Freud's id and the human subconscious and Jungian theories were also incorporated into some arguments. The best answers offered engaged, philosophical and sometimes religious contextual argument to support Dickinson's vision of hope as both fragile and resilient. Good answers often combined a thorough exploration of how particular details of language, rhythm and sound worked within the extended metaphor with a detailed discussion of other poems. For example, they discussed the effect of the word 'thing', the implications of 'perch', the use of anaphora, and the way sound creates expanse with 'strangest Sea —'. They focused on concerns such as the interest in the natural world showing detailed knowledge and appreciation of such poems as *I have a Bird in spring, or A Bird came down the Walk* —, rather than pursuing the idea of hope or despair.

Question 4

JOHN DONNE: Selected Poems

- (a) There were too few responses to comment.
- (b) This question invited candidates to analyse *Divine Meditations 4* from *Holy Sonnets*, considering ways in which Donne presents the soul. Most answers to this question were well done. The best answers drew on knowledge of contemporary religious and spiritual beliefs and the philosophies expressed by Donne, making interesting and insightful comments on sin, redemption and the eternal. Most were able to explore Donne's imagery, making apposite comments in relation to the soul and how Donne conveys a sense of its duality. They discussed aspects of structure, the impact of direct address to the soul, the significance of different colours, the dramatic impact of the analogy 'like a pilgrim ... Or like a thief' and the effect of the word 'blushing'. Wider reference to the selection varied with some referring to details of context. Less successful answers focused more broadly on death and mortality, dealing in more general terms with the detail of the text.

Question 5

THOMAS HARDY: *Far from the Madding Crowd*

- (a) This question required candidates to discuss how Hardy presents different attitudes to marriage in the novel. The text was quite popular with the (a) and (b) options enjoying equal attention. Answers tended to be strong with most meeting Level 4 criteria or above. Some drew on their knowledge of Hardy's life, speculating about how his experiences may have influenced his attitude to marriage and inspired his characterisation, particularly in terms of Gabriel Oak and Bathsheba. One good answer developed a strong argument in which Bathsheba and Fanny were well compared – 'one determined to be independent and the other always dependent though they both end up with Troy'. Some candidates chose to place Bathsheba at the centre of their answers, developing coherent and supported arguments. Less successful answers tended to focus on narrative accounts of the plot or a schematic discussion of the four main characters' varying attitudes to marriage with some attempts to contextualise arguments.

- (c) This question required candidates to discuss how Hardy shapes a reader's response to Bathsheba in a passage from Chapter 1 and in the wider novel. Better answers offered thorough analysis with secure textual knowledge. There was strong personal response as candidates engaged particularly well with the character of Bathsheba and their enthusiasm led to focused development and some original interpretations. Some explored the effect of the natural description in the first paragraph on the reader's perception of Bathsheba as a charming 'rarity', a 'product of nature' who will be shaped by experience from a headstrong girl into a woman who appreciates what Oak has to offer her. There was some effective exploration of ironic foreshadowing and the significance of the meeting. Less successful answers working at Levels 2 and 3 latched on to the idea of Bathsheba's vanity and struggled with close reading of the passage. Exploration of some details of methods, such as language and the use of dialogue were attempted, though undeveloped, and not really focused on the question.

Question 6

BRAM STOKER: *Dracula*

- (a) This question invited candidates to discuss some of the different effects created by Stoker's use of settings. While not as popular as the (b) option, this question gave some candidates the chance to write about the significance and effects of the gothic genre. Some excellent answers were seen, displaying wide knowledge and understanding with assured analysis of character, theme and context. Some were able to take the question in some original and thought-provoking directions with one using the question to create compelling arguments about Stoker's use of setting to 'develop a view of the epic and confined to breed a sense of brooding evil'. Less successful answers lacked the knowledge of specific settings and wrote in vague terms about Dracula's castle and London.
- (b) This question required candidates to analyse a passage from Chapter 1, showing how Stoker presents Count Dracula here and elsewhere in the novel. Most were able to comment on the more obvious details in the passage such as the threatening weather and description of the passengers' obvious fear and the 'red lips and sharp-looking teeth' belonging to the, as yet, unidentified Dracula. More successful candidates were able to link these details to the presentation of Dracula in the castle, his ability to shape-shift, specific instances of his vampirism and the use of religious symbols and artefacts for protection against him. Many were aware of gothic conventions and wrote confidently about the use of darkness and the lamplight and the description of the horses, identifying evidence of Harker's vague awareness of some sort of supernatural power associated with the character. There were some impressive, perceptive answers to the extract. The best relished showing their appreciation of the way Stoker uses extracts from Harker's journal for dramatic irony commenting on how Stoker shows his ignorance as to why the driver was concerned to avoid the rendezvous, his puzzlement at the whispered conversations, his failure to understand the significance of the quotation in German and to appreciate the desperate reason for the numerous 'universal crossings'. Less successful responses offered paraphrased accounts of the passage with some making general comments about pathetic fallacy.

Section B

Question 7

MARGARET ATWOOD: *The Handmaid's Tale*

- (a) This question invited candidates to discuss some of the ways Atwood shapes a reader's response to Offred. This is a very popular text but the (a) question was less popular than the (b) option. The full range of marks was seen. Considering the seminal nature of the question, it was surprising that more candidates did not attempt it. Some struggled with the breadth of the question, perhaps overwhelmed by the wealth of material available in relation to Offred. It is certainly worth covering the skill of planning for selection from a large amount of information in class. Also, the focus on shaping a reader's response gives a steer to how points could be chosen and used. Many did not write as though they had experience of reading the book, giving no sense of Offred's internal life. For example, many would over-invest in explaining Serena's jealousy and ill treatment of her or offer general ideas about Offred's love for her daughter. The least successful answers relied heavily on narration of the plot, selecting a few key episodes to write about. However, some answers working at Levels 2 and 3 did begin to show awareness of the need to create a line of argument with the recognition of a certain ambivalence towards Offred. Only a few succeeded in tailoring their wide

knowledge and understanding of character and presentation into a coherent and well-argued essay. Better essays saw 'her role as both subservient and in control of the Commander'. One essay argued that 'the lack of certainty in her fate is intriguing to the reader' with some success. More successful points included: 'the attitudes of the Marthas, the Aunts and Serena offset by the Commander and Nick' and the fact that 'the reader is inspired by her (Offred's) resilience to preserve some part of herself, even during the ceremony, from defilement'. A few good responses mentioned the use of the first-person narrator and examined the effects of her language in specific scenes such as The Ceremony, at the Wall or in the private napping scenes to show some of the ways Offred preserves a sense of her own identity and humanity. One effective response demonstrated appreciation for Offred's caustic humour and delight in wordplay.

- (b) This was a very popular question. It required candidates to analyse the effects of a passage from Chapter 38 of the novel. Responses were seen across the ability range. Some misread the narrative as being Offred's rather than Moira's, but this was not widespread. Those who did not recognise the passage as being Moira's story tended to lack secure knowledge across the rest of the answer. Most candidates knew that Moira was the narrator and effectively considered her role, for example, as 'a rebel, a fighter' who 'gives hope for her and Offred's future.' Some explored how Moira was used to supply more information about the state of Gilead and how this reinforced the sense that neither of the two women had any choice but to continue to do what they needed to do in their present situations to survive. Clear knowledge was demonstrated in many answers, for example in terms of the colonies and Moira's new role in Jezebel's. There was some awareness of Atwood's concerns with respect to sex and hypocrisy as well as male attitudes. Many responses were astute with good understanding, not only of Moira's development of character, but also what she reveals about the nation state of Gilead. The best answers explored the coarseness of the language, discussed how it revealed the brutality of the State and desensitized those living in it. They linked it to previous examples of Moira's rebelliousness and explored how, without Offred saying anything in the scene, the reader got the impression that Offred was disillusioned with her idea of Moira as a heroine. Some made productive use of a feminist critical perspective to discuss gender politics in the passage and elsewhere in the text.

Question 8

SUJATA BHATT: Selected Poems from *Point No Point*

- (a) This question invited candidates to discuss Bhatt's presentation of the natural world, using a quotation prompt and referring to three poems from the selection. Few answers were seen to this question with the (b) option more popular. Those who attempted the question tended to produce strong answers with reference to relevant poems. *The Peacock* and *The Stinking Rose* were examples of poems used to answer this question.
- (b) This question invited candidates to write a critical appreciation of the poem, *29 April 1989*. All levels of achievement were seen but some weak responses appeared to treat the poem as an unseen. Use of other poems and reference to characteristic methods and concerns were rarely seen. Most mentioned that Assam tea was a signal of her heritage and a comfort to her but few pursued the idea of how Bhatt used or reflected on the Indian heritage or experience of dislocation elsewhere. Only the most confident could discuss feelings of exhaustion generated by the use of the natural speech rhythms and free verse. They commented on the significance of the weather, the way Bhatt revealed her lack of purpose and tried to come to grips with the more positive impact of the promise in the 'rich round fullness in the air' and how it is supported by the quirky reference to Beethoven's piano.

Question 9

JAMES JOYCE: *The Dubliners*

- (a) This question invited candidates to write about how Joyce presents characters feeling trapped in two stories from the collection. Very few responses were seen. These tended to be Level 5 or 6 responses with thorough and perceptive handling of the idea of being trapped. For example, Eveline is trapped by her inability to make a decision, and, in *Sisters*, the priest is trapped physically after suffering another stroke. Development of personal response and critical appreciation of different views were well-handled.
- (b) This question invited candidates to analyse the effects of the writing in a passage from *The Dead*. This question attracted few answers but was more popular than the (a) option. The question tended

to attract responses in the Level 2 and 3 range. Some tended to treat the passage as an unseen piece, struggling to contextualise it in the light of the wider text. Sometimes attempts to analyse reflected an inability to engage with relevant details for example, 'The indentation of each paragraph prepares the reader to welcome the tragic situation and feelings.'

Question 10

Jackie Kay: Selected Poems from *Darling*

- (a) This question invited candidates to explore ways in which Kay presents different kinds of prejudice. Several answers were seen at different levels of achievement, but this question was not as popular as the (b) option. Candidates were invariably knowledgeable and supported their answers with close reference to poems. Some approached the question in a straightforward way, giving accounts of poems such as *My Grandmother*, *Dressing Up*, *Teeth* and *Gambia*. Candidates sometimes over-invested in biographical material to explain Kay's interest in racial and gender prejudice.
- (b) This question invited candidates to write a critical appreciation of an extract from *The Underground Baby Case*. The full range of achievement was seen with the least successful answers struggling with basic understanding of the poem. Some were misled by the length of the extract into a line-by-line, stanza-by-stanza mechanical exercise which limited development and depth of interpretation. Some of the less successful responses treated the poem as a case study in grief and mental illness with the better of these still managing to use details from the poem as evidence. Some excellent responses addressed Kay's dramatic monologue form including close analysis of the unreliable psychological state of the narrator. Some candidates used the effects of the spoken voice and the moments when it appeared to lack coherence to discuss this perspective. Others considered the change of name from Kofi to Peter and pursued the biblical references – the idea that the reference to 'away in the manger' suggested that the baby was her saviour; her use of the word 'disciple' and the irony of the name Peter, as the person who denied Christ three times. Some appreciated the contribution of certain words such as 'he pretends he is my washing', the simplicity of 'his mother/gave him to me really', the use of 'picked', the simile 'toys scattered like memories' and the use of repetition at the beginning and in the cruel repetition in her whispered assertion that Peter is 'all right' because he loves her.

Question 11

JEAN RHYS: *Wide Sargasso Sea*

- (a) This question required candidates to consider how far and in what ways they agreed with a quotation about Antoinette's husband. This question was quite popular and attracted answers at all levels of ability. Weaker candidates struggled with the question and sketchy knowledge of the text led to some undeveloped and thin answers. Some of these less successful responses resorted to narrative summary with some personal views tacked on. Basic or straightforward retelling of Antoinette and Rochester's relationship were shaped with some rather better attempts demonstrating awareness of Cosway's influence. Reference to methods was often limited in scope and variety. Better answers featured some productive use of the social context and feminist perspective to explain the circumstances of Antoinette's husband's marriage for money and how this compromised Antoinette's independence. There was some debate over whether his early sympathetic behaviour was calculated or genuinely kind but even while making allowances for his dislocation and alienation, most argued that his refusal to give Antoinette her proper name, his increasing racism and use of Amelie, made him a bad man. Effective essays offered specific detail, and commented on the impact of Rhys giving us access to his increasingly dislocated and obsessive voice in which he expresses his determination to 'break' Antoinette and deprive her of any lover and the place she loves.
- (b) This question was slightly more popular than the (a) option. It required candidates to discuss the effects of the writing in a passage from Part 3. On balance, this question was rather better handled than (a) with more candidates displaying relevant, engaged knowledge and understanding of Antoinette's plight. There was sympathetic support for her which was, at times, expressed at the expense of focused analysis, but the question did inspire some candidates to secure levels of achievement. More successful responses were able to contrast the setting with the Caribbean and were able to comment on the intense appeal and significance of the red dress, the memory of the flowers and the scents in the final paragraph. They also linked her manipulation of Grace and the purchase of the knife with deviousness elsewhere in the novel and considered the inevitability of her use of violence. These essays showed some sympathetic understanding of the character of

Antoinette and her situation – for example why speaking to her ‘as a stranger’ was so offensive, why she was angry at the word ‘legally’. Less successful answers attempted a running commentary approach which resulted in some paraphrasing and summarizing with very partial discussion of Antoinette’s character as it is revealed here.

Question 12

STEPHEN SPENDER: Selected Poems

- (a) This question required candidates to write about Spender’s use of different settings in three of his poems. There were few answers to this question with the (b) option proving much more popular.

Poems used to answer this option included *In No Man’s Land*, *Air Raid*, *Missing My Daughter* and *Seascape*. Better answers showed appreciation of literary methods and formed convincing personal responses. Less successful responses struggled to illustrate their answers with details from the poems and this resulted in some superficial arguments.

- (b) This question invited candidates to write a critical appreciation of the poem, *No Orpheus, No Eurydice*. The weakest answers effectively treated the poem as an unseen text, offering very little evidence that they had seen the poem before and effectively producing unconvincing running commentary on the text. It is obvious to examiners when poems have not been studied and candidates are effectively responding spontaneously to what is on the page. Having said this, many answers understood the poem completely and developed effective arguments. Some took Spender’s conceit of Orpheus and Eurydice, unpicking its significance in terms of the contemporary broken relationship and considering how Spender deploys that classical allusion in terms of a modernist setting. There were a number of sensitive responses and some detailed analysis of the effects of the violent images at the beginning and the tearing of the hearts and the change in tone with acceptance of reality in the last stanza. *The Separation* and *The Double Shame* were often used in more secure answers in reference to the wider collection.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/43
Pre- and Post-1900 Poetry and Prose

Key messages

- Close attention to the focus and detail of the question is key to a relevant, successful response.
- When answering passage-based questions, the detail of the text must be central to the answer.
- Evaluation of other opinions and interpretations should support the central argument of the answer.

General comments

It is important to note that this paper is taken by only a small number of candidates in the November series. Examiners are unlikely to have seen a full range of answers on the texts studied and some texts may have only been studied by one or two small centres.

It was very pleasing to see positive and relevant personal engagement with the texts studied. The vast majority of answers reflected careful study and enjoyment of the poetry and prose. Rubric infringements are rare, but still in evidence and it is vital that centres check that their candidates are studying one poetry text and one prose text from the syllabus. One of these must be pre-1900 and one post-1900. There are still examples of scripts where candidates have written about Jane Austen's *Persuasion* and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* or Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

Knowledge and understanding underpin successful approaches to the paper and the way in which they are applied to questions and used in the time available is a key indicator of success. Knowledge can include purposeful reference to the context of the text being studied and some good examples of its use were seen in the course of marking. It is important to be aware that there is a difference between background knowledge and context. Essentially, background knowledge relates to biographical details or anecdotes about a writer or the times in which they wrote that does not necessarily illuminate an argument about the text. Contextual comment may relate to the historical, social, cultural or literary nature of the text which may incorporate details of the writer's life but should be focused on supporting the key terms of the question. For example, explaining that Emily Dickinson lived in Massachusetts is a piece of background information. On the other hand, considering how her hometown of Amhurst inspired her interest in nature which features so prominently in her work, and supported her intellectual life, is contextual. Use of material is dependent on the question and a number of candidates still compromise their success by indiscriminately trying to include everything they know. Selection of points to use is paramount.

Analysis is best when laser-focused on the detail of the text, relevant to the question and developed with personal interpretation. Less successful answers tend to generalise discussion of effects or consider them without exemplification. For example, listing technical terminology without providing examples or details of effects on the reader. Comments such as, 'The poet uses metaphors, alliteration, rhyme, juxtaposition and similes in their writing' are unhelpful. It is much better to select an example of an effect and explore its use in the context of the question and a writer's ideas and style. Genre is also a key discriminator in terms of candidates understanding how the nature of a text is crucial to its meaning and critical reception. Candidates should be aware, for example that poems are not organised in paragraphs. Understanding of the nature and use of literary techniques is important in reaching higher levels of achievement. Candidates should use terminology accurately and with relevance, avoiding blunt, catch-all approaches. It is fine to refer to 'diction' and 'juxtaposition' where appropriate, but important to avoid using them as blunt tools to attempt exploration of lexical choices and contrast.

In terms of **(a)** style questions, responses need to focus the question onto specific episodes and moments in the texts. There should be close reference to detail throughout, even though the question has an overarching focus. While examiners do not expect a response to be comprehensive, they do want the candidate to select aspects of texts that are apposite to the question. In the lower levels of the mark scheme, responses tend to rely on narrative and paraphrase. Higher level answers demonstrate focused arguments with specific and relevant illustration and a sense of developing overview as discussion progresses. Some candidates drift from the question, a situation that can be resolved through careful planning and active proofreading. Overly long answers are particularly prone to digression, and it is important that candidates do not approach the exam with a view that writing as much as possible is their overarching goal. Spending some time breaking down a question is a good use of time in the exam and leads to a much more tightly focused answer.

With **(b)** style questions, candidates must make the passage or poem provided the main focus of their answer. Selecting detail from the passage and exploring this in terms of the question focus is key to producing a salient and successful answer. Alongside this, candidates should refer to the wider text or poems in a selection, but they must prioritise discussing the passage or poem printed in the exam. At the lower levels, this often takes the form of working through the text methodically, sometimes relying on narration with an almost incidental application of argument. More successful answers approach the question strategically with detailed and insightful analysis.

Personal response and evaluation of varying interpretations appear as two different assessment objectives in the mark scheme but can work in tandem to support coherent arguments. Personal response is most effective when linked to analysis and a train of thought pertaining to the terms of the question. Some good examples were seen of candidates linking elements of their personal response to the views of critics or alternative readings. This avoided the situation where evaluation of varying opinions is tacked on to essays, or incongruous in the line of argument presented. Use of secondary sources was excellent in some responses but represented a distraction in others or was barely in evidence – a feast or famine situation where imbalance could compromise achievement. Some candidates do not engage with Assessment Objective 5 at all, and it is important to address this. At A level, candidates should be able to take a multi-dimensional view of text. This can be done successfully in a number of ways, including relevant reference to critical approaches such as Marxist or feminist views and using comments made by individual, named critics. Candidates can also articulate the existence of other possible interpretations, for example by exploring one idea and then commenting ‘on the other hand’. Use of modal auxiliary verbs to convey the idea of a range of possible views can work well but should offer clarification of different opinions. Reference to a film production or review can also work effectively. Overall, use of personal response and evaluation of other opinions should be integrated into discussion.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

JANE AUSTEN: *Persuasion*

- (a) There were too few responses to comment.
- (b) There were too few responses to comment.

Question 2

GEOFFREY CHAUCER: *The Merchant’s Prologue and Tale*

- (a) This question required candidates to discuss some of the ways Chaucer shapes a reader’s response to Januarie. This was quite a popular question with candidates keen to share their views on the character. The full range of achievement was seen. Some argued reasonably that a reader’s response to Januarie would vary between sympathy for an old man who is the victim of infidelity and blame for not heeding the advice of Justinus, and for being selfish and motivated by lust. The best answers were lively and engaged with the detail of the text. Some of these successful answers pursued the ironies via the proverb, ‘Love is blind’ and explored free indirect speech and imagery related to food and trade. Some made good use of feminist and Marxist perspectives with a few pointing out that the final irony proved that May turned out to be exactly the kind of wife that misogynistic Justinus warned about. Less successful answers working at Levels 2 and 3 often

retold the story of May and Januarie with occasional comments on their problems. These answers tended to lack discussion of Chaucer's methods.

- (b) This question was not as popular as the (a) option. The question required candidates to discuss an extract from the tale, considering Chaucer's poetic methods and concerns. Most offered accomplished analysis of the passage with interesting insights into what it demonstrates about Chaucer's concerns and exploring critical views with lucid awareness of effects and methods. Less successful answers tended to be largely narrative or paraphrase in approach with some generalisation about life in Chaucer's time and one or two comments about the use of questions.

Question 3

EMILY DICKINSON: Selected Poems

- (a) This question required candidates to comment on three of the poems in the light of a quotation about the frailty of human life compared to the strength of nature. This was a popular question with the full range of achievement seen. Poems chosen for use were varied and included *After great pain, a formal feeling comes* —, *A narrow Fellow in the Grass* and *Because I could not stop for Death* —. Candidates tended to be more comfortable writing about nature than making a comparison. One strong answer seen explored the extent to which nature was seen as threatening in descriptions of volcanoes and storms and how in some cases the threat was exploited to express human anger and frustration or diminished by either language, the 'cordial connotations of Fellow contrasts with the stereotypically hostile emotions of snakes', or humour in the irritating buzz of a fly which intrudes at a moment of utmost human frailty. There was some good use of methods including references to Dickinson's use of anaphora to build up the effects 'as images are piled on top of each other' and her use of 'Animalistic and kinaesthetic imagery used to depict the wildness and destructive power of nature'. Less successful analysis tended to focus on capital letter use, punctuation and dashes. Analysis of these features is rarely productive in exploring texts.
- (b) This was an extremely popular question, the most answered on this paper. The question required candidates to discuss the poem *One need not be a chamber — to be Haunted* —. Other poems were varied and included: *A Still – Volcano – Life* —, *I have never seen "Volcanoes"* — and *I felt a Funeral, in my Brain*. The given poem really captured the imagination of candidates and some exceptionally detailed and sensitive responses were seen, exploring the unruly and uncontrollable nature of subconscious thoughts and memories. Awareness of the gothic genre was well-handled by many and some personal exploration of how the poem relates to the idea of ghosts was seen. Many relished discussing the concrete imagery of the extended metaphor and the way the effects of anaphora, sentence structure and enjambement contribute to the impression of a mind in chaos. Some discussed the way the imagery suggested disassociation in the speaker's view of herself and made good, detailed links with *My Life had stood — a Loaded Gun* —. The focus on the metaphysical intentions of the poem and its psychological impact was often well-handled. Wider context included consideration of Freud's id and the human subconscious and Jungian theories were also brought in. One interesting response noted, 'Dickinson's contrast of the 'indoor' brain and 'outdoor' ghost is symbolic of the disturbing, unknown subconscious and the supposedly frightening known real world'. Less successful answers took a paraphrase or running commentary approach with some overuse of biographical speculation regarding Dickinson's mental health. Preoccupation with this factor was not as evident as in previous series, however.

Question 4

JOHN DONNE: Selected Poems

- (a) There were too few responses to comment.
- (b) There were too few responses to comment.

Question 5

THOMAS HARDY: *Far from the Madding Crowd*

- (a) There were too few responses to comment.

- (b) This question required candidates to analyse a passage from Chapter 15 of the novel, showing what it adds to understanding of Hardy's methods and characterisation. Several responses were seen. Answers were often successful in relating the extract to the wider text, sometimes drawing on Hardy's biographical details to speculate on what led him to represent Bathsheba as such a complex character. There were some good observations on Oak's long-suffering, patient character with some comments on the significance of names relating to characteristics, for example Gabriel seen as a guardian angel figure. Some observed the class distinction between Boldwood and Oak, demonstrated in 'Ah-Oak' and 'Not a bit of difference Mr Boldwood'. Oak's kindness to Fanny, her naïve expectations of Troy and Boldwood's estimation of Troy – 'clever and up to everything' – and his dismissal of Fanny as a silly girl were also of interest. Less successful answers tended to offer straightforward discussion of characters, largely confined to Oak and Boldwood.

Question 6

BRAM STOKER: *Dracula*

- (a) This question invited candidates to write about how Stoker presents the battle between good and evil in the novel. This was a popular question with a range of achievement seen. Some good answers discussed contextual issues such as the fear of reverse colonisation, conflict between Eastern and Western Europe and the idea of the 'other'. Some saw the contrasting presentation of women as angels in the house or femmes fatales or the idea of the modern woman in Stoker's presentation of Mina. Surprisingly, few candidates chose to write about Dracula himself. The best answers were those that looked at the relationship between rational science and religious belief and superstition. Some wrote well about the weaponisation of blood and the significance of human love, loyalty and camaraderie as well as sacrifice. Less successful responses tended to be general in approach with some binary assumptions about characters such as Lucy and ideas about vampirism.
- (b) This question invited candidates to write about how a passage from Chapter 17 presents the role and character of Mina. This was also popular with a range of achievement seen in answers. Many viewed Mina as the ideal woman, faithful to Jonathan and supporting consistently throughout, a confidante to Lucy in reference to the wider novel. She was also contrasted with Lucy, considered to be more chaste and thus not succumbing to vampirism to the same extent. She was also discussed as a New Age woman with her use of modern technology as well as her intelligence and capability. There was some discussion of narrative methods in terms of Mina telling her own story through her journal. Less successful answers struggled to refer to details of Mina's role in the wider novel and offered little in terms of methods.

Section B

Question 7

MARGARET ATWOOD: *The Handmaid's Tale*

- (a) This question required candidates to discuss how far Atwood presents the statement 'Gilead is within you' as being true of Offred. This was a very popular question but not as popular as the (b) option. On the whole, this question was well done as candidates explored the attempts to brainwash the handmaids with some evaluating how far this is achieved. The blaming of Janine for being raped was seen as an example of success of Gilead's insinuation into Offred and her peers, as was Offred's passivity in comparison to Moira's rebellion. The more successful essays considered the 'ways' Atwood presents this by examining Offred's first person account of her own awareness of the extent to which her ideas have changed – or not - such as the encounter with the Japanese tourists or her responses to the propaganda about pregnancy and her participation in the birthing ceremony. Some argued that Offred's small acts of rebellion, such as the use of butter as moisturiser, suggest Gilead is not within her – 'Offred largely succeeds in replacing the power of Gilead within her with the power of storytelling'. Less successful answers tended to have some plot-based knowledge and gave an account of how Offred gradually rebelled and became sympathetic to, and dependent on, Mayday to get her out.
- (b) This question required candidates to analyse the effects of a passage from the Historical Notes, showing its significance to the novel as a whole. The full achievement range was seen in this very popular question. The main distinction of success was between candidates who used the passage as an opportunity to review their knowledge of the novel up to the end of Offred's account without

any critical evaluation of the Notes, and the accomplished answers that used the knowledge integrated with a critical assessment of the Historical Notes as a continuation of the themes and preoccupations of the main novel. Some candidates compared the use of the cold, dispassionate tones typical of historians to Atwood's use of first-person narrative elsewhere in the text. Some considered the impact of the final sentence in the passage and how the transformation of Offred's story into history reveals the privilege of hindsight and the biases of historians, the formal setting denying women a voice, diminishing evidence of their lived experience. This was supported by some detailed analysis of the effects of the almost euphemistic language in the passage, such as the idea of women being 'recruited' for 'reproductive purposes' and 'allotted', which was compared to the horror of *The Ceremony* and other examples. Most picked up on references to contemporary events and concerns to comment on Atwood's assurance that she had not included anything that hadn't already happened. Some clearly appreciated Atwood's inventiveness in the creation of her 'speculative fiction' and the seriousness of her intention to warn readers of the dangers of current trends towards the repression of women's and minority rights and totalitarianism worldwide.

Question 8

SUJATA BHATT: Selected Poems from *Point No Point*

- (a) There were too few responses to comment.
- (b) This question required candidates to write a critical appreciation of an extract from the poem, *The One Who Goes Away*. A few answers were seen to this question. Most candidates noticed the contrasts between style, language and concerns of this poem with other works. Weaker answers worked through the poem, not really understanding the meaning or the context, with some moments of understanding about home and foreign places. These answers made little comment on Bhatt's methods and little or no mention of the wider text. Better responses got the idea of the importance of play as a key theme. One suggested being away from home means 'her poetry is sentimental and romanticised in its reminiscences – here the gold and silver of waves and moon and the calling of the wind'. Her conversational 'voice' and her use of alliteration and, particularly, repetition were considered and exemplified by better responses.

Question 9

JAMES JOYCE: *Dubliners*

- (a) There were too few responses to comment.
- (b) There were too few responses to comment.

Question 10

JACKIE KAY: Selected Poems from *Darling*

- (a) There were too few responses to comment.
- (b) There were too few responses to comment.

Question 11

JEAN RHYS: *Wide Sargasso Sea*

- (a) This question required candidates to write about Rhys's presentation of Antoinette's experience of alienation in the novel in response to a quotation prompt. Better answers demonstrated awareness of Antoinette's situation in terms of rejection, racism and violence, for example, 'Her Bi-racial, mixed cultural childhood is significant, as she is racially abused and attacked by other children'. Effective discussion of role models such as Christophine and Aunt Cora were seen as offering her different racial perspectives. Alienation within marriage was considered after Antoinette is 'traded to a wealthy white man'. Less successful responses struggled to find detail to support their points, resulting in more general accounts or relying too far on personal responses to the character.

- (b) This question was more popular than the (a) option. It required candidates to explore the effects of the writing in a passage, considering how it presents Antoinette's husband. Very good responses ranged through the given passage for evidence of ways in which Rhys suggests the feelings of Antoinette's husband. Some argued that fragmentation in this internal monologue suggested Antoinette's husband was, himself, being shown to be mad. They commented on the use of the natural imagery and violence of his desire to 'break' Antoinette; the intrusion of elements of his conversation with Christophine; his unfounded sexual jealousy and the use of repetition to communicate his obsessive possessiveness. The most successful responses also considered the implications and impact of his invitation to her that if she shed a tear for him, she would find him 'gentle'. Most considered the repetition of 'lunatic' and the cruelty of the declarations that 'She'll not laugh in the sun again', and were able to link the passage briefly to his reaction to the natural world and contrast this behaviour with some evidence of kindness or sympathy earlier on in his relationship with his wife.

The chief discriminating factor was the confidence with which candidates examined the choice and use of language in the passage and the effects of the sentence structure at specific points in the passage.

Question 12

STEPHEN SPENDER: Selected poems

- (a) There were too few responses to comment.
- (b) This question was quite popular. It invited candidates to write a critical appreciation of the poem, *Seascape*. Most answers were Level 4 or higher, many offering effective reference to other poems in the collection in support of their arguments. The most successful answers conveyed a strong appreciation of the idyllic description of the calm ocean contrasted with its potential for violence and danger. 'They drown' was identified as a shocking turning point in the mood of the poem. They wrote about how calm is restored on the surface at the end of the poem, while what lies beneath the sea remains 'scarcely scanned'. Some picked up on the citation/epigraph which helped them to explore the poem and link it to other expressions of loss, while others went for descriptions of the natural world in such poems as *Polar Exploration*. Less successful responses spent more time attempting to track the development of ideas and reflected personally on the meaning, sometimes finding themselves in contradiction of their own arguments. It is important when approaching these questions to begin with a sense of direction or a thesis statement to ensure consistency of approach.