

SPANISH LITERATURE

Paper 8673/41
Texts 41

Key messages

It is essential to answer the question as it is written on the Question Paper. It may help to have a strategy to deal with this to ensure that the whole essay is clearly focused.

- Read the question carefully before starting to write – underline key elements, for example relationship between X and Y; theme to be analysed; why is scene X critical to the understanding of the play.
- Outline the argument to be presented (e.g. agree with premise in question for following reasons ...; this extract/scene/chapter sheds light on character X and leads the reader to question their role throughout the text.
- Make a brief plan outlining the issues to explore and note quotations or incidents to support the argument.
- Keep checking back to the question at the end of each paragraph to make sure all the material is relevant or add a brief sentence to show this and then link to the next paragraph.
- Draw ideas together in the conclusion.

General comments

Candidates were aware of the requirements of the examination and generally showed good knowledge of the texts studied.

Comments on specific questions

Sección 1

Question 1

Ernesto Sábato: *El túnel*

- (a) Examiners saw a reasonable distribution of answers to both options on this text. Most answers recognised the strange nature of the role of Allende. The complicated three-way relationship is difficult to comprehend, and provokes questions in the reader's mind rather than explanations. This scene reflects many in the novel. Do we understand who María really is? Why is Allende friendly towards Castel? No wonder Castel does not know how to react to Allende as he was unaware until that point that María is married. Many candidates discussed the metaphorical irony of Allende's blindness. The most successful essays explored the inexplicable nature of the relationship throughout the novel – several focused solely on this episode, consequently not fulfilling the demands of the question. Allende's reaction to María's murder, for example, was important in helping us to understand him.
- (b) This question focuses on one of the key themes of the text. The majority of responses tended to argue that María's evasiveness and Castel's self-obsession were the main reasons for the couple's problems with communication. The best essays questioned whether there had been any clear communication between them at all – the interpretation of the scene depicted in Castel's painting was never openly discussed. Castel made assumptions about María's understanding of it but we have no idea if they were true. Castel reveals much about his difficulty in communicating in the depictions of his dreams about a bird, an unstable bridge and the metaphor of the tunnel itself. Some candidates mentioned the importance of listening and noted that the main characters tended to be selective in what they heard. Another interesting point raised in some answers was Castel's

attempt to be understood by appealing to the reader through the direct communication of first-person narrative.

Question 2

Gabriel García Márquez: *El coronel no tiene quien le escriba*

- (a) Both options on this text were popular. The majority of candidates gave correct responses to (i) and followed instructions in offering a brief answer to (ii). In responding to (iii), the most successful essays looked at the concept of poverty in its widest sense, going beyond the couple's dire financial position and loss of their only son. Candidates mentioned how their hardships were mitigated by feelings of solidarity with fellow townspeople, such as the doctor, and their strong relationship and affection for one another, even though strained at times. Some noted how this was underlined by the comparison with Don Sabas and his wife.
- (b) Candidates' performance in answering this option was similar to (a) in that most identified the failure of the state in dealing with the colonel's pension as representative of an ineffective and unjust society. The best essays managed to broaden the argument to include such aspects as the curfew, censorship and general atmosphere of violence, epitomised in the murder of Agustín, apparent in this society.

Question 3

Anónimo: *Lazarillo de Tormes*

- (a) Most responses to (i) and (ii) were correct. Many candidates knew this section of the novel well but struggled to apply the scene to the whole text. Essays showed how Lazarillo further honed his survival skills through begging in order to maintain the Escudero and himself and that he became aware that appearances can be deceptive. This was the first time Lazarillo had to care for another person, was not subject to physical abuse, but was cruelly betrayed when his master disappeared. Only a few candidates were able to relate this to later stages of the novel such as Lazarillo's rejection of the buldero, his acquisition of more expensive clothes and the final moral dilemma over his wife's unfaithfulness.
- (b) Most responses to this option suggested that the decision to name only Lazarillo and his parents was a device to show his importance in what amounts to his life story. More detailed and wide-ranging answers saw the novel as a serious criticism of Spanish society at the time and the characters Lazarillo deals with. As these individuals can be seen as emblematic of distinct sectors of society, their anonymity conveys the sense that they represent all within such sectors. In addition, some argued that as anonymity intentionally dehumanised these largely malevolent groups, it protected the author from repercussions arising from his criticism of powerful bodies such as the church.

Question 4

Pedro Calderón de la Barca: *El alcalde de Zalamea*

This text attracted fewer responses than most, so the comments refer mostly to the points Examiners were anticipating.

- (a) This option focuses on social status. Answers to (i) and (ii) were straightforward. In responding to (iii), the concept of power, privilege and status can be dealt with in many ways. Comparing and contrasting such characters as Crespo and Don Lope, or the Captain and the King are helpful in deciding what power constitutes and how it can be used for good, in, for example, restoring harmony at the end of the play.
- (b) This question asked candidates to consider the importance of Crespo's role as alcalde and his interpretation of the role as well as his character. Most would analyse his social and moral code and relate this to his concept of justice. This can be considered further in his treatment of his own son, whom he imprisons, as well as the case of the captain. The fact that Crespo's position as alcalde was confirmed by the King is crucial in the reader's understanding of the moral case.

Sección 2

Question 5

Carmen Laforet: *Nada*

- (a) The key factor to identify before starting this response is the '*tema central*'. Most answers to this question tended to focus too much on the obvious differences in class and wealth between Andrea and Pons' family, and as an extension to her other University friends. Looking beyond this, the episode also underlines important facets of Andrea's personality. The theme could be described as Andrea as an outsider and her inability to take responsibility for herself. Andrea blames Pons for the disaster but she had seen the opportunity in an over-romanticised way, likened to Cinderella. This is her first experience of seeing life in such a privileged household, even wealthier than Ena's. The question to ask may be whether we see Andrea mature and begin to understand how to take decisions and responsibility over the course of the novel.
- (b) Examiners saw some thoughtful responses to this option, looking at post civil war society in Spain. Most candidates referenced the comparative poverty of Andrea's family following the war, as her memories of visiting the flat when young presented a very different picture. The class divisions post-war were very sharp and the issue of devastating psychological effects on the population, exemplified in the violence between Juan and Román enacted on Gloria also needs to be analysed. An interesting interpretation suggested that the controlling and hypocritical religiosity of Angustias could be read as a reflection of the Franco regime, while the bohemian group of artists may represent post-war Spain trying to forge a new identity.

Question 6

Federico García Lorca: *Bodas de sangre*

Virtually all candidates answered on this text.

- (a) Most answers on this option understood that there were wider issues to analyse beyond the main narrative of the marriage of the Novia and Novio but only the most successful essays managed to present a thorough argument. These responses referred to implications such as passion and romance, tradition, social, familial and economic obligations, along with the consequences of departing from the accepted norms. Lorca's focus on the needs of the individual as opposed to what was expected of them by the family and society were also mentioned. Judicious use of quotation always enhances the argument and gives the candidate an opportunity to show appreciation of the language.
- (b) This was one of the most popular questions on the whole Paper. The question must be read very closely before beginning to write. A number of candidates made the mistake of not noticing that the question invited a comparison between La Mujer and other victims, and concentrated solely on the one character. However, Examiners saw a wide range of responses overall, with a number of characters said to be innocent victims. Chief amongst these was La Madre, who had suffered many losses and even Leonardo was cited as an innocent victim of his uncontrollable passion and lack of wealth. There were some interesting examinations of the word 'inocente'; some candidates thought that it had negative connotations associated with naivety and passivity. The conclusion that Leonardo's wife was the most innocent was overwhelmingly supported.

Question 7

Gabriela Mistral: *Tala/Lagar*

As has been the pattern in previous sessions, the range of possible answers to this text is too wide to give representative comments. In addition, there were only a small number of responses.

The key to success in tackling the poems is to have extensive experience and understanding in analysis, encompassing meaning as well as detailed study of the use of language.

Question 8

Isabel Allende: *La casa de los espíritus*

- (a) This presented a problem for some candidates who mistook Esteban García for Esteban Trueba. Most of those who correctly identified Esteban García were able to put him in context as the illegitimate grandson of Trueba, who had raped his grandmother at Tres Marias. The resentment he felt at being ignored was noted in the early chapters of the novel, as his unpleasant character emerged. This was heightened when he was slighted again after helping Trueba to find Pedro Tercero. The role he played towards the end of the text saw him driving the plot to a large extent and acting as an agent of moral retribution. His desire to punish Trueba and his family was not ultimately fulfilled as exemplified in Alba's reactions at the end of the narrative.
- (b) This was the more popular of the two options. Most responses were in agreement that even strong female characters with feminist credentials were depicted as subservient to men. Nivea was dependent on her husband's political career to add credibility to her own campaigns and Clara was, to some extent, affected by her husband's violence. The only individual who possessed real freedom, power and financial independence was Tránsito Soto. This was achieved thanks to a loan from Trueba, but she was clearly in charge of her own destiny and had worked hard to establish herself. Women were generally perceived to be permitted fewer freedoms than men, but the political instability depicted in the novel denied freedom to all, no matter how powerful they had been. Changes in society over the course of the novel recognised the value of all individuals and that power, for example in the hands of the landowner, should not be used to subjugate others for selfish gain.

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Paper 8673/42
Texts 42

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Comments on specific questions

Sección 1

Question 1

Ernesto Sábato: *El túnel*

- (a) Responses to (i) were correct but in answering (ii), Mimí's affected ego was sometimes understated. The roles of both Hunter and Mimí were instrumental in the narrative and also in helping the reader to understand Castel. Hunter's relationship with María (or supposed relationship) was said to have triggered her murder and reinforced the idea that María was amoral and callous. Castel's reaction to Hunter and Mimí can be linked to his general antipathy towards most sections of society, in particular art critics, revealed earlier. A key point here is Castel's sense of relief when he convinces himself that María's absence from the room proves that she shares his negative opinion of the pair. The fact that Hunter is related to Allende reminds the reader of María's husband. The interaction between all four characters underlines the theme of communication and lack of this.
- (b) This option gave candidates the opportunity to offer an alternative to the description of the novel as one involving a crime of jealousy. The best answers explored the idea that this is a psychological thriller as well as an existential novel, in which the author presents themes such as alienation and isolation within a dysfunctional society. The role of Castel's dreams supports the examination of psychological anxieties and the inverse presentation of a crime novel when the perpetrator admits his guilt on the first page leads us to ask why the murder was committed rather than by whom.

Question 2

Gabriel García Márquez: *El coronel no tiene quien le escriba*

- (a) This question attracted many responses. The best answers found a number of ways to determine the significance of the gallo. Virtually all saw the bird as a symbol of hope and wider ranging essays included analysis of the gallo as a potential route out of poverty for the colonel and his wife, an emotional link to their assassinated son and a rallying point of resistance for the beleaguered population. An interesting discussion focused on the quotation '*Ese animal se alimenta de carne humana*', where this was seen as the gallo representing the government, which feeds on the population at the same time as neglecting their basic needs. Another point of view saw the gallo as a point of conflict between the couple or the subject of a more philosophical question about optimism and realism.
- (b) Fewer candidates chose this option. In the main the essays focused almost entirely on the colonel himself. He was described as blindly optimistic and convinced that everything will work out – his pension will arrive and the gallo will win. This was buoyed up by the excitement and camaraderie of the cockfight. Other aspects of the question were not explored by most candidates, such as comparison with Don Sabas, who has none of the problems associated with material poverty yet is not happy. Similarly, we see the colonel in situations where he is troubled, whether by illness, or embarrassment (when trying to sell the clock), or worry about feeding himself and his wife as well as the gallo. Most analysed the final word of the novel, with varying interpretations.

Question 3

Anónimo: *Lazarillo de Tormes*

- (a) Most answered (i) and (ii) correctly although a number of candidates did not identify the ciego's pleasure in injuring Lazarillo. **Part (iii)** was met with broad agreement with the quotation; Lazarillo suffered much hardship but it made him the man he was. There was some variety of opinion over what sort of man he had become; one who made the best of a poor start in life or one who had been corrupted by his experiences and deceived himself. Some essays discussed the thematic link of wine, causing him pain in the quoted extract but then enabling him to achieve a degree of stability in selling the Arcipreste's wine – with the question as to the degree of Lazarillo's self-deception and questionable moral status.
- (b) Candidates generally agreed that the novel is more than a simple chronological series of episodes in Lazarillo's life but found it difficult to explain what made it more complex. The most successful responses analysed the progression of the main character psychologically, considering how he changed and adapted according to his circumstances and the ways in which he justified his decisions, revealing his moral (or immoral) standpoint. A small number mentioned literary techniques such as use of the first person narrative, humour and irony, which added complexity and depth to the language.

Question 4

Pedro Calderón de la Barca: *El alcalde de Zalamea*

There were few responses to these questions.

- (a) The extract and questions focus on Isabel and the Captain. It is not really possible to justify the Captain's actions, which were motivated by lust and selfishness, not love. He displayed a sense of entitlement, taking advantage of his status and physical power to destroy Isabel's future happiness, disrupt the harmony of the community and violate moral and civil laws. The Captain arrogantly planned the assault, was clearly guilty but arrogantly maintained his immunity from civil law.
- (b) An analysis of the verse in the play requires detailed preparation. There is much to discuss, from the apparently realistic speech of the soldiers in the opening scene to the masterly use of poetic imagery in other scenes, for example where Crespo talks of his pride in the work on the farm. An effective way of presenting the argument would be to choose a small number of scenes and analyse the techniques used. For example Isabel often makes many references to nature, emphasising her upbringing and innocence. The Captain describes the strength of his passion vividly, preparing the audience for the inevitable. In order to avoid simply listing examples of

Calderón's poetic technique it is more effective to look at key scenes and analyse why he used specific metre and vocabulary, for example, to produce the effect he desired.

Question 5

Carmen Laforet: *Nada*

- (a) Answers to this question tended to focus on the fact that life in Barcelona did not meet Andrea's expectations as her family's circumstances had altered drastically since her last visit pre-war and she found herself in the midst of a dysfunctional group of people in a city emerging from a traumatic experience. As a result of this, Andrea seemed to be lacking direction and consequently was more vulnerable. She found the threat of violence unsettling at home, seemed to live vicariously by observing other's lives from the outside and unsurprisingly accepted a way out when offered a job in Madrid. Andrea lacked agency in making her own decisions and is generally passive. It is difficult to determine to what extent Andrea gained insight and maturity during her time in Barcelona. Other characters in the novel also suffered from unexpected changes to the life they anticipated. Ena, her mother and Román being a case in point and Gloria's situation is another example of surviving in extremely difficult circumstances.
- (b) This question concerns Andrea's relationship with Ena which is of huge significance throughout the text. The quotation given in the question gives a good starting point as Andrea sees her friend as the ideal she aspires to. Certainly Ena's family is wealthy, seems to be stable and they are welcoming to Andrea. However there are dark undercurrents which gradually reveal themselves. Andrea is embarrassed by her family circumstances and is shocked to discover Ena in her home, and to find out about her friend's interest in Román as well as Ena's mother's history with him, and the tragic outcome of the contact. This seems to present a different side to Ena. It is difficult to gauge to what extent Andrea understands Ena. Her conversations with Ena's boyfriend give some insight, but Andrea agrees to go to Madrid with Ena at the end of the novel. Andrea is desperate for a friend, a support and the opportunity to share in a 'normal' life, despite her feelings of inferiority. The extent to which Andrea goes to Madrid with Ena with confidence or simply because it is better than the depressing alternative of staying in the flat in Barcelona raises issues to discuss.

Question 6

Federico García Lorca: *Bodas de sangre*

- (a) This was a popular choice. The best answers began by analysing the meaning of the quotation given in the question and relating it to the characters who can be said to have kept their true feelings silent and as a consequence suffered great unhappiness. So the focus is on the individual who had yielded to societal or family pressures, doing what was expected of them but not what they truly wished to happen. Most began by discussing Leonardo and la Novia, explaining why they had not been permitted to marry in the past. Some candidates then extended the argument to la Madre and Leonardo's wife. A deeper understanding of the issue was mentioned in a few instances, by analysing how Lorca presents the consequences of challenging the norm. Destiny, in the form of the supernatural characters as well as the human ones, conspires to prevent those choosing their own path determined by their passion to succeed. Candidates are reminded that arguments should be supported by reference to the text.
- (b) This question focused on the poetic imagery, in particular references to nature. It seemed that many candidates had studied Lorca's use of imagery but did not distinguish between those referencing nature and others, such as knives, which do not. The most convincing answers analysed water images, the torrent of Leonardo and the trickle of el Novio and the stagnant water in the lullaby. Floral images, such as the bride's headdress are relevant as well as the fecundity of men described as various flowers and trees were mentioned alongside the horse, contrasting landscapes; distant, harsh and dry or rich in vines.

Question 7

Gabriela Mistral: *Tala/Lagar*

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Question 8

Isabel Allende: *La casa de los espíritus*

- (a) This was the more popular of the two options. Most essays attributed Trueba's single mindedness, capacity for hard work and ruthless ambition to the privations and unhappiness of his childhood. The text gives little evidence of physical ill-treatment during his youth and it is difficult to argue that Trueba's violent behaviour and inhumanity can be excused, although some candidates tried to do this. There are instances where a more considered personality emerged, such as his grief when Rosa died, his friendship with Tránsito Soto and his despair over the imprisonment of Alba. These are few compared to his selfish behaviour throughout his adult life in the personal, professional and political spheres where he had the power to determine the destiny of individuals and the whole country.
- (b) Fewer candidates chose this option. They tended to agree with the idea that political power, which is seen in the novel as having a devastating effect on the country, too often lay in the hands of a few individuals. With Trueba as an example of this, it becomes clear that the motivation to serve the public may not be altruistic. Dissent is dealt with harshly – the way Trueba treated his farm workers was extended to his political opponents. Those candidates with the best knowledge of the text were also able to add details of a few events beyond the control of individuals which had an important impact on the plot, such as the accidental death of Rosa and the earthquake.