WORLD LITERATURE

Paper 0408/01
Portfolio (coursework)

Key messages

- Teachers should refer to the 0408 Syllabus and Coursework Training Handbook during the planning stages of the course.
- Tasks for all assignments must be worded to enable candidates to fulfil the requirements of the band descriptors.
- Written assignments should include marginal annotation by the teacher which comments on strengths and weaknesses of candidate performance and should be clearly linked to the marking criteria.
- Carry out a clerical check of the transcription of marks to the Individual Record Card, the Coursework Assessment Summary Form(s) and Mark Sheet(s).

General comments

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

The Critical Response

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

Successful responses demonstrated clear critical engagement with the selected text in response to a well-structured task. These responses analysed the ways writers achieve effects and were supported by well-selected and concise textual references. There was some perceptive analysis of the language writers used. A range of texts were used where candidates had been encouraged to select a favourite text. Centres must ensure that these texts are of a similar challenge as the set texts for the syllabus and that assignments allow candidates to meet the criteria for marks in the higher bands.

Weaker responses resulted from less structured tasks where candidates tended to narrate the text rather than to explore specific themes or characters. These responses frequently used lengthy quotations with no analysis of the text or made unsubstantiated assertions. Weaker responses were also self-penalising where only one poem or short story was referred to.

Centres are reminded that there is no requirement to compare poems, or short stories; the best responses deal with each poem or short story in turn, offering sustained analysis of the texts.

The Empathic Response

To be successful, empathic responses should focus on a specific character and moment in the text. The task set should provide candidates with the opportunity to demonstrate their by writing in an engagingly authentic ‘voice’ for the chosen character. Better responses were firmly rooted in the text whilst less successful responses did not focus on a precise moment and showed little understanding of the character or moment in question. The use of direct quotation in empathic writing is to be discouraged as this does not allow the candidate to capture a character’s voice. As reported in previous sessions, short stories are unsuitable for the empathic response as plot and character development do provide enough scope for candidates to create a sustained ‘voice’.

The Recorded Conversation

It is pleasing to see that prepared talks by candidates were not seen this session and the objective of a 'recorded conversation' adhered to.

The most successful oral responses focused on the ways the writer *presents* a character, idea or theme and engaged fully with their chosen character or theme. These responses were detailed with specific and much well-selected textual references to support their ideas. Well-thought out questions from the teacher help candidates to explore fully their chosen topic and there were some lively and insightful ideas discussed.

Weaker responses tend to become narrative, retelling the plot or part a character plays without exploring how the writer *presents* them: this approach does not allow candidates to meet the criteria for high reward in the band descriptors.

The upper limit of seven minutes for a recording is not mandatory; some candidates were able to demonstrate skills in the higher bands without extending the conversation to a full seven minutes. Teachers are reminded that recordings should be stopped after the seven minute limited has been reached.

Teacher annotation

Teachers are reminded that all assignments should show evidence of having being marked to assist the moderation process. Focused ticking of salient points, supported by brief reference to the band descriptors in marginal annotation and a detailed summative comment are a prerequisite for all written assignments. These annotations allow external Moderators to see the rationale for the final mark awarded. It is also important that any marks changed during the internal moderation process be justified with an additional comment, explaining the reason for the change.

Administration

Rigorous clerical checks should be carried out by the centre to ensure that no candidate is disadvantaged by any transcription errors made by the person entering marks on individual record cards, coursework assessment summary forms and mark sheets. To facilitate final checking by the Moderator, it would be appreciated if candidates could be listed in the same order as the MS1s and not in class groups. Care should be taken over the presentation of the portfolios. The Individual Record Card should be fastened securely (e.g. by a treasury tag or staple) to the written assignments (and not placed in plastic wallets or cardboard folders) to ensure ease of access. Assignments should be organised in the order presented on the Individual Record Card. It would be helpful for oral recordings to be sent by USB pen or, if CDs sent, they be suitably protected to avoid damage or breakage during postage.

WORLD LITERATURE

Paper 0408/21
Paper 2: Unseen

Key messages

- Candidates who maintain a focus on the exact wording of the question (written in bold in the question paper) are more likely to achieve relevance in their answers. Those who methodically work their way through the bullet points alone without reference to the stem question tend to offer a more general appreciation of the text, forgetting about the key focus word(s) in the question itself.
- Those candidates who allow time for thinking about the text and planning their response are in a better position to produce a successful analysis.
- Candidates who are able to integrate comments on language, form and structure smoothly into their discussion tend to be more successful than those who take a more rigid approach, often assigning separate paragraphs to 'form', 'structure' and 'language' as if they were unconnected features of the writing.
- There is no automatic reward for 'feature spotting'; comments about simile, metaphor, juxtaposition, etc. should be firmly followed up by an exploration of the meaning or effect achieved.
- Good quotation technique goes a long way to achieving fluency and sharp focus in answers. Those candidates who can use short quotations embedded within a sentence are more likely to achieve this than those who copy out lengthy quotations followed by 'This shows … '. Particularly unsuccessful are quotations with the 'middle' missing, replaced by ellipsis; candidates should be willing to quote directly the words they are commenting on.

General comments

Lack of evidence on the candidate's script of any type of planning was not necessarily a bad thing. One assumes that candidates had taken the opportunity to highlight, underline or otherwise annotate their poem or prose passage on the question paper itself, a practice that is thoroughly recommended. Writing notes or underlining directly onto the text provides a visual summary of which areas of the text are to be commented on, and allows candidates to check that they are providing sufficient coverage across the whole of the poem or passage. It is also a time-saving practice in that there is no need to copy out quotations to be used; these can simply be highlighted or underlined. Of those candidates who chose to write a plan, most simply noted a few key ideas, often selecting language points or technical features. A lengthy plan is normally counter-productive, as the time taken to create it often eats into the limited time available for writing.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

'Bored'

How does the poet strikingly convey her thoughts and feelings?

To help you answer, you might consider:

- the description of the things she used to do with her father
- how the poet uses words and images to reveal different emotions
- how the poem is organised.

It was pleasing to see that every response seen this session showed a sincere and genuine effort to connect with the texts offered, and those who chose to look at the poem demonstrated a willingness to engage with poetry as a distinct form of writing. All candidates were able to connect with the ideas in the poem at some level, given that the subject of boredom with the adult world and its endless and seemingly pointless

activities is something that they could probably sympathise with! At a basic level, the activities the poet mentions were listed and supported with a little quotation from the text. Candidates often pointed out that she was the one *Holding the log/while he sawed it* and that she found this 'boring', or that she was the one *Holding/the string while he measured* and that this, too, was 'boring' for her. This type of observation retrieved basic content from the text at a surface level, though did not enter into analysis. Those candidates who found it difficult to move on from this type of surface-level response, showed a basic understanding of literal meaning in the text, achieving reward in the lower bands only.

In order to show some sort of interpretation of the poet's thoughts and feelings, it was helpful if candidates could find a synonym for the word *bored*, as it is mentioned by the poet, in various forms, seven times in the poem, and so simply repeating that she was 'bored' did not take the analysis very far. Some candidates suggested that she was 'tired', 'fed up' or 'weary' with the endlessly repeated activities and this went some way towards a more interpretative response. For learners still grappling with skills of analysis, it may help if they grasp the idea that they cannot show understanding of a word by simply repeating it, and so plenty of classroom practice in finding synonyms would strengthen these skills.

Repetition is one of the most basic elements of the poet's toolkit and a very easy technique for learners to recognise and grasp. Many pointed out the poet's repetition of *Holding* in the first few lines, which was a good way for candidates to demonstrate that they could move beyond a simple understanding of literal, surface meaning in a text and begin to consider the *craft* of writing. However, no marks are awarded for straightforward feature-spotting, and simply saying that the repetition of *Holding* showed that the poet was 'bored' was not enough to take this comment into the realms of analysis. Only those candidates who could make a conscious effort to look at the *effects* created by this repetition and, even better, at exactly *how* these effects are achieved were rewarded for their efforts. A few simple comments on how the repetition shows that she had to repeat the boring activity of simply holding something over and over again sufficed as demonstrating some understanding of how language works in achieving effects. Some candidates noted that holding is an inactive, passive activity that underlines the fact that she wasn't actually *doing* anything and that this is what led to her boredom. Those with some technical knowledge of grammar saw that *Holding* ends in *–ing,* which suggests that the activity went on continuously, and that, combined with the repetition, it seemed that the tiresome act of standing there not really doing anything felt endless to the young girl. Other opportunities to comment on repetition were offered by the writer's repeated use of *or* between lists of uninteresting activities, *sat* and *looking* to indicate passivity/inactivity, *over and over*, etc. The *repeated* use of *–ing* words (no need to describe them as 'present participles', which might be difficult for some learners to remember) was also something to look at: holding/looking/carrying/drying/ferrying/shuffling; these all work together to create the effect of endless, small-scale domestic activity, described by the poet as *Such minutiae*. Repetition, then, must not be overlooked as a poor cousin to metaphor, simile, onomatopoeia, etc. in looking closely at the writer's craft, and is often a better choice for candidates to comment on than the likes of caesura and enjambment which are often 'spotted' (and more often erroneously so) by candidates who think examiners might be impressed by their knowledge of such foreign-sounding sophisticated words, but which so often lead to rehearsed, vague and quite meaningless comments on how they allow the reader to 'pause and think' or to make the poem 'flow'.

Moving through a poem in sequence often leads to a more successful response and the structure of this poem is an excellent example of why. Candidates were prompted by the third bullet to consider how the poem is organised and, at a basic level, noted that structurally the poem is presented as a single stanza, some seeing this as reflecting the non-stop repetition of the boring activities described by the poet. This was a good start and a fair point. Comments on structure, however, that could move beyond the physical layout of the poem on the page to look at the thematic structure of the poem – the movement of its ideas – demonstrated a higher level of understanding. Quite a few candidates seemed unable to progress their response to the poem beyond the list of endless, unengaging activities, seeing the whole piece as a bit of a teenage rant against being made to do things that are 'boring'. This often restricted their marks from reaching the upper band ranges. Those who could see the poet's change of perspective on her childhood at the end of the poem where she looks back and re-assesses the time spent with her father demonstrated a fuller understanding of the writer's thoughts and feelings. The tone of regret was picked up on by some candidates who recognised that the poet now seemed to value the time spent with her father, time now lost to her, perhaps through his death. One candidate suggested that the poet's knowing *too much* was because she had experienced the hardships of adult life and now valued the carefree times of her childhood, a thoughtful response. In general, however, too few candidates paid enough attention to the ending of the poem. Perhaps some guidance in class when preparing for the Unseen exam to include at least some comment on the endings of poems as well as the beginning and middle stages would be beneficial, as endings are often so important in articulating key ideas only introduced in the earlier stages. An appreciation of the ending of this poem may also have led candidates to notice structural 'signposting' of the writer's ultimate change of mind being fed into the poem's earlier stages: note the intricacy and beauty of the figurative language in the poet's

descriptions of the tiny details she began to notice in her surroundings, how her attention slowly transfers to her father himself – *the blackish and then the graying/bristles on the back of his neck* and *the whorled texture of his square finger, earth under the nail* and her recollection of these times being *sunnier* with *more birdsong*, even though she knows that this was not the case. These more positive details are fed in almost unnoticed amongst the banality of her other memories until the volta proper at the end.

A general piece of advice when preparing candidates for this paper would be to encourage candidates to engage with ideas, feelings and emotions in a poem *first* in order to consolidate their understanding of what the poem is about. Try to answer the following: Who is the 'voice' in the poem? Where are they? What are they doing? Are they talking about the here and now or are they looking back or forward in time? Do they seem happy/bitter/sad/regretful/bored? Encourage learners to think about what feelings/ideas are apparent at the start of the poem and whether these have progressed or changed in any way by the end. Then, and only then, once a solid understanding of the poem's content has been digested, is a learner ready to look at *How?*, i.e. the nuts and bolts of the writer's craft and *how* these ideas are conveyed. An approach like this would go some way to encouraging a more genuine, engaged response to poetry rather than a dry search for literary techniques. The following from one of this session's candidates shows a real emotional engagement with the writing:

***…** the poet (has) to carry wood or dry the dishes in a 'boring rhythm'. This tries to convince people that there is a melody somewhere, but unfortunately everything is repeated and feels as one note played all over again, no one wants to listen to a song like that.*

Question 2

'Lifi in the forest'.

How does the writer vividly depict Lifi's experiences in the forest?

To help you answer, you might consider:

- the description of the forest and its creatures
- how the writer presents Lifi's responses to her experiences
- the impact of the writer's use of sound

Candidates in general were able to give a good account of what Lifi's experiences are, tracking her initial movement towards the sun, sitting against the tree trunk, eating berries, etc. Some responses kept in this vein throughout the essay, supporting observations with a little quotation or reference to the text and perhaps some personal response to Lifi's situation. This narrative/descriptive approach to the text, however, demonstrated a response to the surface meaning of the language only and could therefore only be rewarded at the lower band levels. To access the higher bands, candidates had to make a considered response to the word 'vividly' in the question, a word that prompts them to look closely at the writer's craft.

The bullet points in the question were made use of by many candidates, though a word of warning might be issued here. If candidates use the bullets to *structure* their essays, there is a danger that the end result is a rather disjointed discussion of discrete elements of the passage, with little sense of the impact of the unfolding narrative. When preparing for the exam, it is understandable that less confident learners may want to use the bullets as a framework on which to hang their comments. However, candidates might be reminded that moving through the passage in sequence is often the best way of demonstrating an understanding of it and that the key question they must answer is written in bold: *this* is the question to be answered and the bullets are there simply as a suggestion of areas to look at whilst answering the main question.

The opening paragraph of the passage was, of course, much commented on. The featureless topography of the forest land was noted as a reason for Lifi becoming lost in the first place, and the sun that was *strangely out of place* was selected by many candidates as evidence that she was lost. Only the more observant candidates were able to comment on the impact of this quotation: the irony that it was, in fact, Lifi who was out of place and not the sun, which of course, to our eyes, maintains a steady and familiar trajectory. Surprisingly, not many candidates commented on the sentence *Little did she know what this mistake would cost her* and why the writer would put this comment here at the start of the piece. Narrative hooks designed to pique the reader's interest in the rest of the story are often quite easy for candidates to grasp. Authorial comment on characters and action is recognisably different from straightforward narrative and being able to

distinguish between these two elements of writing would open up analysis for some students trying to improve their skills.

In the third paragraph, many candidates picked out the sentence *She pulled her cloth over her head and tried to sleep*, seeing this action as perhaps indicative of Lifi's fear and wanting to shut out the forest or to hide herself. This kind of comment demonstrates empathy, that candidates were putting themselves in Lifi's shoes and immersing themselves in the narrative, showing a good level of personal response to the writing. Some also picked out the things that Lifi eats in this paragraph, but few were able to dig deep into the adjectives here: why does she eat them if they were only *half-ripe* and had a *sweet sickly* taste? What does this tell us about her situation? Why is this supper described by the writer as *meagre*? Why are a few berries called *supper* at all? This level of analysis is what would demonstrate a candidate's response to the word 'vividly' in the question, mentioned in comments above as being a necessity to gain access to the higher levels of reward.

The third bullet – *the impact of the writer's use of sound* – drew much response from all candidates. Quite a few were able to see the contrast between the frightening sounds of the night-time – *crickets cried/bats flapped/owls hooted/a frog croaked* – and the more cheerful sounds of birds *chirping* when Lifi wakes up in the morning. This ability to see a writer's use of contrast is a good way of demonstrating understanding of some of the structural features of writing. Surprisingly, the onomatopoeia of these 'sound' words was not really commented on, whilst many candidates homed in on *crickets cried*, seeing this as personification as crickets don't actually cry. There was misunderstanding of the word *cry* here, of course, which is commonly used in English to describe the high-pitched sound some animals make and here was used in a literal sense, having nothing to do with the act of 'crying' tearfully. This was a pity, as many candidates spent quite a lot of time exploring this perceived personification when they could have been more purposefully commenting on the effects created by the alliteration of *crickets cried* with the hard 'c' sound mimicking the sound of the insects, or the onomatopoeia of the other sounds. If candidates are put off commenting on onomatopoeia because they don't know how to spell this big, complex word (and this could be a genuine concern for some candidates), then teachers could encourage them to talk about 'noisy words' or 'words that echo the sound they describe'. Personification is often seen by candidates where no personification exists and teachers might be aware of this when encouraging learners to look at the figurative nature of language.

Response to the second half of the passage tended to focus on the narrative itself, simply tracking Lifi's movements towards her final return to civilisation. This dependence on narrative recount may have stemmed, perhaps, from the more literal style of the writing here, but candidates would do well to remember that writers use more than just similes, metaphors, alliteration, etc. to create effects; even literal language can be used for stylistic purposes. For example, in the sentence *She tripped, fell, rose and fell again, shouting* the writer lists verbs in quick succession to convey the stumbling panic of Lifi's movements. So, listing of words is another feature that candidates could consider in their analysis. On the subject of movement, towards the end of her stay in the forest Lifi is described as follows: *She limped on, tired, hot and constantly thirsty.* A candidate who could compare this description of an exhausted Lifi at the end of the passage to her introduction at the start where *Lifi started walking towards the setting sun*, apparently with a fair degree of ease, would be able to demonstrate an understanding of the development of Lifi's character through the narrative, and would therefore be addressing matters of narrative structure. If they also noticed that the *half-ripe fleshy brown* berries at the start of her ordeal had now become *green* and so presumably unripe berries, they might also be able to comment on this as one way that the writer conveys Lifi's growing desperation for food.

Thinking *visually* can also help candidates engage with the writer's purpose. What is the writer conveying by presenting Lifi, an old woman, with a gaping, voiceless mouth, stumbling over her own feet whilst stretching out her hand towards the boys? How are we meant to respond to this image? And in considering this, we are now in the realms of reader response to the writing, so … how do we feel at the end of the passage when Lifi is finally taken in, fed and listened to *in amazed sympathy*? How do we feel when we realise that she walked forty miles and narrowly escaped the clutches of dangerous hyenas? It is always worth advising candidates to save a little bit of time to make at least one or two comments on the ending of a passage as this is where a resolution, cliffhanger, moral or thematic reflection, etc. is most likely to occur.

In summing up reader response to Lifi's experiences in the forest, one candidate wrote:

In conclusion, the writer vividly transmits Lifi's adventures in the forest by developing anxiety, tension and fear in the reader due to conveying an infinite forest, and the dangers within. Yet it also highlights the positivity and strength of will in Lifi, bringing up feelings of admiration, respect and pride.

This was an effective ending that summarised response to the passage concisely.

WORLD LITERATURE

Paper 0408/22
Paper 2: Unseen

Key messages

- Candidates who maintain a focus on the exact wording of the question (written in bold in the question paper) are more likely to achieve relevance in their answers. Those who methodically work their way through the bullet points alone without reference to the stem question tend to offer a more general appreciation of the text, forgetting about the key focus word(s) in the question itself.
- Those candidates who allow time for thinking about the text and planning their response are in a better position to produce a successful analysis.
- Candidates who are able to integrate comments on language, form and structure smoothly into their discussion tend to be more successful than those who take a more rigid approach, often assigning separate paragraphs to 'form', 'structure' and 'language' as if they were unconnected features of the writing.
- There is no automatic reward for 'feature spotting'; comments about simile, metaphor, juxtaposition, etc. should be firmly followed up by an exploration of the meaning or effect achieved.
- Good quotation technique goes a long way to achieving fluency and sharp focus in answers. Those candidates who can use short quotations embedded within a sentence are more likely to achieve this than those who copy out lengthy quotations followed by 'This shows … '. Particularly unsuccessful are quotations with the 'middle' missing, replaced by ellipsis; candidates should be willing to quote directly the words they are commenting on.

General comments

Lack of evidence on the candidate's script of any type of planning was not necessarily a bad thing. One assumes that candidates had taken the opportunity to highlight, underline or otherwise annotate their poem or prose passage on the question paper itself, a practice that is thoroughly recommended. Writing notes or underlining directly onto the text provides a visual summary of which areas of the text are to be commented on, and allows candidates to check that they are providing sufficient coverage across the whole of the poem or passage. It is also a time-saving practice in that there is no need to copy out quotations to be used; these can simply be highlighted or underlined. Of those candidates who chose to write a plan, most simply noted a few key ideas, often selecting language points or technical features. A lengthy plan is normally counter-productive, as the time taken to create it often eats into the limited time available for writing.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

The Best of School

How does the poet strikingly convey his thoughts and feelings about this lesson?

To help you answer, you might consider:

- the descriptions of the classroom and the students
- how the poet uses words and images to portray the impact of this lesson
- the significance of the final two stanzas.

The subject matter of a school lesson and the relationship between a teacher and his pupils meant that virtually all candidates were able to engage with this text from personal experience; this was evident in some very thoughtful personal responses to the poem. The bullet points of the question were well used in framing

candidate responses, though there were a significant number of essays that failed to address the final two stanzas of the poem – perhaps because of timing issues – and which suffered as a result as this is where the ground covered in the poem's previous stanzas is pulled together in an abstract reflection on concrete experience. A word of warning must be said on the use of the bullets, however. If the bullets are used to *structure* the candidate's response – as an essay plan, in effect – then there is a danger that what the candidate writes reads as a collection of disconnected, discrete observations about particular elements of the text. For example, comments on the writer's use of *words and images* in some essays were confined to the central paragraphs only, leaving two-thirds of the essay unsupported by quotation and close analysis. Candidates should be advised that the bullets are largely there to aid a response to the key question which appears in bold above the bullet points. Moving the analysis through the poem in sequence, bearing the bullets in mind, is generally the most successful strategy for most candidates. It is understandable, however, that some less confident learners may wish to respond to the bullets in turn if it provides them with some sort of structure in their writing that would otherwise be too difficult for them to achieve.

For many candidates, the opening of the poem with its light imagery of *colourless gloom* and *bright ripples* of sunlight was the first area of the text for analysis. These contrasting descriptions of the light in the classroom caused consternation for some who, having read the first three lines only, saw the classroom as being gloomy *and* full of rippling light at one and the same time. At the level tested by this examination the ability to read to a full stop or semi-colon, as in prose, is vital if complete meaning is to be grasped.

The image of the teacher sitting on the shores of a beach was well understood and most grasped the idea of how the teacher thus seems distanced from the boys, being on the periphery or 'shoreline'. The metaphor was seen as being extended by the description of the sunlight and of the boys in their *summer blouses*, giving a generally pleasant feel to the classroom. A word of warning here, however, must be said about comments on connotations. Many candidates saw the mention of sunshine, shorelines and summer blouses as having connotations of beach holidays, asserting that this meant everyone was very relaxed, laid back and enjoying themselves, basking in the warmth of the sun's glow. This, however, is not an accurate reading of the atmosphere in the classroom, which is one of focused endeavour, the boys with their heads *busily* bowed. Teachers are advised, therefore, to watch out for this 'drift' in thinking about connotations, and to impress on their students the importance of considering the overall *context* of an image when coming to a conclusion about which connotations seem to fit the circumstances of the image's use in a particular instance.

The same danger is present when candidates respond to a word with more than one meaning, or with subtle differences in meaning when used in different circumstances. This was apparent in responses to the description of the boys' heads being *busily bowed*. Several candidates interpreted this as the boys actually bowing to the teacher to show their respect for him. Whilst there may be some latent nod to the action of bowing in the poet's choice of this word, it is clear from a more careful reading of the lines that the boys' heads are bowed *As they write* and that they are unlikely to be performing the formal action of a respectful bow whilst at the same time writing. The word *bowed*, here, simply describes the angle at which the boys held their heads as they huddled over their work. The lesson to be drawn here is, again, the importance of reading in context and to avoid the temptation of extracting a single word for scrutiny, drawing only on personal knowledge of that word in order to construct a meaning, rather than seeing it in its context.

It was, however, warming to see candidates responding to the teacher's feelings of satisfaction – joy, even – in his pupils' sense of achievement. The water imagery in the poet's use of *waves*, *stream*, *ripple* and *laves* to describe the passage of knowledge and learning from himself to the boys was grasped by many and even linked back to the water imagery of the shoreline in the first stanza, seeing it as an extension of the same metaphor. One candidate likened the flow of water/knowledge to a river which is often connected to journeys, seeing the boys' academic progress as a 'journey' of personal development. Similarly, the image of the boys as birds and the teacher as providing the *grain* of learning drew much attention and comment. Most grasped that this was a positive image of the boys' eagerness to glean a morsel of knowledge from the teacher and return quickly with it to incorporate into their work. Some, however, became distracted by the words *steal and flee*, entering into a moral admonition of the boys for their bad behaviour. Again, this is occurred when candidates searched for meaning in very small 'chunks' of text, taking the writer's individual language choices out of context with the mood of the piece as a whole. It is important, therefore, to encourage students to think carefully about the mood or tone of a poem and about the stance of the 'voice' before making decisions about meaning in regards to individual elements of the text.

The third bullet asked for some consideration of the final two stanzas of the poem, and most candidates managed to find something to say about their significance. It is good practice to train students always to aim to include a comment on a poem's ending, as it is here that a poet will often draw together the poem's key ideas into some kind of reflective whole, articulating the 'message' of the poem. Even if a point about

something in the main body of the poem has to be sacrificed owing to time constraints, it is usually worth choosing to spend that time on the poem's ending. Moving to the key image, trees were seen by some candidates as representing wisdom (trees live a long time) and the teacher was often seen as the 'tree of knowledge'. The pupils, of course, were the tendrils which are young shoots seeking support, just like the pupils seek support and mentoring from their teacher. There were some particularly poignant comments on how the boys and teacher seem to merge, their lives entwining with each other as the boys carry bits of the teacher within them into their future lives and the teacher takes ownership of their joys, which he shares. One candidate pondered this image in a wider sense, saying: *Many people are responsible for ensuring the children grow into responsible adults; each is a leaf on their trees.*

Candidates should be reminded about the unnecessary use of ineffectual introductions. As a rule, introductions should be brief and say something meaningful about the content of the actual poem under discussion. The least successful openings this session often began *In this essay I will …* and then went on to produce a list of technical features that, purportedly, by their very use strikingly conveyed the writer's thoughts and feelings. For example: *In this essay I will analyse how the writer conveys his thoughts and feelings about his lessons through his use of various techniques such as imagery and description.* Often, introductions like this will continue on to lay out what the candidate intends to look at, which in fact turns out to be a verbatim copy of the bullet points. The time taken to write an introduction like this considered against the amount of reward it attracts (none) provides a poor return on the candidate's time and effort.

A more effective introduction from one candidate was the following:
The poem 'The Best of School' explores the lasting impact a teacher can have on a student's life. It also presents school from the perspective of a passionate teacher reflecting on a lesson. The poet compares the lesson to a day at the beach and acknowledges the students' reliance on him. In the final two stanzas the poet looks to the future and his impact on the rest of the boys' lives.

Here, this candidate has demonstrated a secure grasp of the key elements of the poem in a succinct summary of it, has touched on the writer's use of imagery and has mentioned the impact of the final two stanzas. All comments are kept general as we know that detailed analysis will follow. It would, of course, be unrealistic to expect all candidates to have the ability to produce such an effective opening statement, but teachers are advised to steer their learners away from trite, rehearsed *In this essay I will be …* type of openers and to encourage students to include at least some sort of overview of what they understand the poem to be about. If even this is beyond some students who are still developing their analytical abilities, it is probably a good idea to advise them to dispense with the idea of an introduction altogether and to move straight into their first key point in their opening sentence: time will be saved to spend on more thoughtful, sincere comment on the poem and they will not be penalised for lack of a formal introduction.

Question 2

'Achak the refugee'

How does the writer vividly convey to you Achak's experiences?

To help you answer this question, you might consider:

- the challenges of crossing the river
- the portrayal of Achak's interactions with others
- the way the writer conveys Achak's thoughts and feelings after arriving in Ethiopia.

Most candidates found the passage accessible and were able to show a grasp of its content, following the narrative of Achak's journey from Sudan to Ethiopia. The bullets invited a sequential move through the passage and many adopted this approach to the text, starting with the river crossing, looking at Achak's trades with the boys in the village and ending on his reactions to the group's arrival in Ethiopia. A basic understanding of the text supported by textual detail and quotation was as far as some responses went, but in order to gain access to the higher band marks, the real key to success was a considered response to the word 'vividly' in the question; this word, of course, requires candidates to think about the writer at work, consciously crafting language for effect.

A successful approach to the opening section of the passage was for candidates to recognise, prompted by the first bullet, what the challenges facing the boys actually were. The fact that the river was *wide and deep*, making the crossing difficult and potentially dangerous was noted, and that the boys faced a lack of help or cooperation from the villagers who would not allow them to use their boats. The threat posed by the

crocodiles was often cited and some candidates commented on the fact that when the boys entered the water, *those crocodiles chose to enter the water too*. Many responses that used this quotation tended to leave it at that, or to simply repeat that this made the crossing dangerous. However, a moment's pause to look at the word *chose* in the quotation would have demonstrated a more active engagement with language and how it works. A little comment on the fact that the word *chose* suggests that the crocodiles had made a conscious decision to enter the water immediately the boys entered would have helped here. Some reflection on the effect – that this makes the crocodiles sound predatory, as if they were preparing to attack and eat the boys – would have dug even deeper still. It was noticeable that in many essays candidates were able and willing to make a point and support it with quotation, but there was a general reluctance to go back into cited quotation to explore exactly how language achieves its effects on the reader. It is advisable to encourage this habit: if a quotation is written down, it should always be followed up by some sort of comment on the language in it or on exactly how it achieves its overall effect. This reluctance to explore language and imagery and the mechanics of how it works was, unfortunately, what kept many candidates from achieving reward in the higher mark bands.

The consideration of the challenges facing the boys often ended with the observation that many of the boys were unable to swim and had to be pulled across by those who could and that this made the crossing very dangerous. This often ended the analysis of the challenges and many candidates then moved on to the next bullet. However, there were some responses that took time to consider the *structural* impact of this list of challenges, noting that there is a cumulative effect in the listing of them, and that the difficulties seem to increase in risk as they are introduced, making this crossing seem more and more impossible. This ability to take a broader view of the text and look at emerging patterns is a higher order skill and one that attracts reward from the examiner; training students to look for structural patterns like this in the content (and not just in the layout) of a text is a useful way to improve candidate attainment.

In addressing the second bullet – Achak's interactions with others – many pointed out that Achak seems quite alone and detached from the other boys as he wanders from house to house in search of food, though no one picked up on the fact that the writer uses the phrase *real food* in the text, suggesting that what the boys had been living on during the course of their journey was probably at a basic sustenance level like fruit, berries, roots, etc., illustrating their desperate hunger. The ability to read inferentially is another higher order reading skill that will attract reward and is one that should be encouraged. Some answers went on to comment on the hostility of the village boy's addresses to Achak – *You, boy, where are you from?* and *I want your shirt*. – and noted the plainness of this speech, even its monosyllabic structure, which demonstrated an excellent engagement with tone and how it is achieved.

The following paragraph of the text allowed opportunities for candidates to step out of analysis of the immediate narrative for a moment to look at Achak's reflections on the events being described. For example: *When we arrived there* (the refugee camp) *I would curse my decision to trade my shirt for a cup of maize.* This time shift in the narrative, voiced by an Achak who is at least three years older than the boy in the events being described, reminds the reader that the story is being narrated as a reflection on past events and so the writer is thus able to provide a narrative hook about Achak's future regret of his decision. Although many candidates were able to follow the basic details about the trade of Achak's shirt and the reasons for his regret, few were able to analyse this event at a structural level, which would have moved the discussion onto a higher level.

Achak's ultimate disappointment about what he finds on the group's arrival in Ethiopia was grasped by all, except a few candidates who appeared to run out of time before they could address the ending of the passage. Many described Achak as being 'in denial' about actually being in Ethiopia and that he thought Kur was making a joke. These observations were supported with a little detail or quotation from the text. This was fine as a demonstration of understanding at a basic level. Only those candidates who could analyse the mechanics of the writing, however, were able to move their discussion into a type of analysis that moved their essays up the bands. There was very useful comment from some candidates on the writer's use of negatives in Achak's speech: *No, I said …*/*… no homes*/*… no medical facilities*/*… No food*/*No water*/*This is not that place*, and if the candidate also mentioned the repetition in close succession of these negatives, then all the better. It is worth saying here that the most effective comments not only pointed out that the writer *uses* negatives and repetition, but they also provided specific quotation like that above to illustrate this point. Achak's final repetition of *This is not that place* was used by several candidates to point out the completeness of his disappointment, using this to bring their discussions to a close.

A final word must be said on the quality of essay introductions as there seemed this session to be a return to rather stilted and empty essay openers. Least successful were introductions that began with a simple recount of the story's content followed by: *In this essay, I will argue about how the writer vividly conveys to the reader Achak's experience*, (a straightforward repetition of the stem question) followed by a list of areas

of the text that were to be studied which actually turned out to be a verbatim copying out of the bullet points. Introductions like this rarely demonstrated any real contact with the text or its ideas. A better way into a response was demonstrated by the following candidate's effort: *In the passage, Achak's experience is conveyed as both frightening yet exciting as he – with the other boys – begins to enter the unknown. Towards the end of the passage, however, this feeling of excitement is perceived as short lived and converted instead into utter disappointment.*

Here, there is engagement not only with the general movement of the narrative, but also with its tone. If the candidate had included some indication of the subject of the story (fleeing refugees), this would have proved to be a very good way into the essay proper.

Conclusions were equally problematic for many candidates who resorted to providing a straightforward list of all the previous points covered, leading to overly-detailed repetition of material already presented. Examiners can only reward the same material once, so this approach proved to be a fruitless use of precious time that could otherwise have been more profitably spent on another paragraph of fresh analysis. Conclusions – if included at all, and they are by no means obligatory – should be brief (a single sentence is ideal), general, and perhaps sum up a candidate's personal response to the text. The following was one of the most effective conclusions seen this series: *The writer adds that 'Sudanese adults' were scattered across the fields of Ethiopia, symbolising that although the boys endured a tiresome journey, the fate that they sought to outrun was already ahead of them and was unavoidable.*

Not all candidates, of course, are able to produce such a sharp and succinct summative comment. Instead of offering an ineffective, repetitive conclusion, good advice would be to assure candidates that they can dispense with a formal conclusion altogether and simply provide a paragraph of analysis from near the ending of the passage, which will do the job much more effectively instead.

WORLD LITERATURE

Paper 0408/23
Paper 2: Unseen

Key messages

- Candidates who maintain a focus on the exact wording of the question (written in bold in the question paper) are more likely to achieve relevance in their answers. Those who methodically work their way through the bullet points alone without reference to the stem question tend to offer a more general appreciation of the text, forgetting about the key focus word(s) in the question itself.
- Those candidates who allow time for thinking about the text and planning their response are in a better position to produce a successful analysis.
- Candidates who are able to integrate comments on language, form and structure smoothly into their discussion tend to be more successful than those who take a more rigid approach, often assigning separate paragraphs to 'form', 'structure' and 'language' as if they were unconnected features of the writing.
- There is no automatic reward for 'feature spotting'; comments about simile, metaphor, juxtaposition, etc. should be firmly followed up by an exploration of the meaning or effect achieved.
- Good quotation technique goes a long way to achieving fluency and sharp focus in answers. Those candidates who can use short quotations embedded within a sentence are more likely to achieve this than those who copy out lengthy quotations followed by 'This shows … '. Particularly unsuccessful are quotations with the 'middle' missing, replaced by ellipsis; candidates should be willing to quote directly the words they are commenting on.

General comments

Lack of evidence on the candidate's script of any type of planning was not necessarily a bad thing. One assumes that candidates had taken the opportunity to highlight, underline or otherwise annotate their poem or prose passage on the question paper itself, a practice that is thoroughly recommended. Writing notes or underlining directly onto the text provides a visual summary of which areas of the text are to be commented on, and allows candidates to check that they are providing sufficient coverage across the whole of the poem or passage. It is also a time-saving practice in that there is no need to copy out quotations to be used; these can simply be highlighted or underlined. Of those candidates who chose to write a plan, most simply noted a few key ideas, often selecting language points or technical features. A lengthy plan is normally counter-productive, as the time taken to create it often eats into the limited time available for writing.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

The Best of School

How does the poet strikingly convey his thoughts and feelings about this lesson?

To help you answer, you might consider:

- the descriptions of the classroom and the students
- how the poet uses words and images to portray the impact of this lesson
- the significance of the final two stanzas.

The subject matter of a school lesson and the relationship between a teacher and his pupils meant that virtually all candidates were able to engage with this text from personal experience; this was evident in some very thoughtful personal responses to the poem. The bullet points of the question were well used in framing

candidate responses, though there were a significant number of essays that failed to address the final two stanzas of the poem – perhaps because of timing issues – and which suffered as a result as this is where the ground covered in the poem's previous stanzas is pulled together in an abstract reflection on concrete experience. A word of warning must be said on the use of the bullets, however. If the bullets are used to *structure* the candidate's response – as an essay plan, in effect – then there is a danger that what the candidate writes reads as a collection of disconnected, discrete observations about particular elements of the text. For example, comments on the writer's use of *words and images* in some essays were confined to the central paragraphs only, leaving two-thirds of the essay unsupported by quotation and close analysis. Candidates should be advised that the bullets are largely there to aid a response to the key question which appears in bold above the bullet points. Moving the analysis through the poem in sequence, bearing the bullets in mind, is generally the most successful strategy for most candidates. It is understandable, however, that some less confident learners may wish to respond to the bullets in turn if it provides them with some sort of structure in their writing that would otherwise be too difficult for them to achieve.

For many candidates, the opening of the poem with its light imagery of *colourless gloom* and *bright ripples* of sunlight was the first area of the text for analysis. These contrasting descriptions of the light in the classroom caused consternation for some who, having read the first three lines only, saw the classroom as being gloomy *and* full of rippling light at one and the same time. At the level tested by this examination the ability to read to a full stop or semi-colon, as in prose, is vital if complete meaning is to be grasped.

The image of the teacher sitting on the shores of a beach was well understood and most grasped the idea of how the teacher thus seems distanced from the boys, being on the periphery or 'shoreline'. The metaphor was seen as being extended by the description of the sunlight and of the boys in their *summer blouses*, giving a generally pleasant feel to the classroom. A word of warning here, however, must be said about comments on connotations. Many candidates saw the mention of sunshine, shorelines and summer blouses as having connotations of beach holidays, asserting that this meant everyone was very relaxed, laid back and enjoying themselves, basking in the warmth of the sun's glow. This, however, is not an accurate reading of the atmosphere in the classroom, which is one of focused endeavour, the boys with their heads *busily* bowed. Teachers are advised, therefore, to watch out for this 'drift' in thinking about connotations, and to impress on their students the importance of considering the overall *context* of an image when coming to a conclusion about which connotations seem to fit the circumstances of the image's use in a particular instance.

The same danger is present when candidates respond to a word with more than one meaning, or with subtle differences in meaning when used in different circumstances. This was apparent in responses to the description of the boys' heads being *busily bowed*. Several candidates interpreted this as the boys actually bowing to the teacher to show their respect for him. Whilst there may be some latent nod to the action of bowing in the poet's choice of this word, it is clear from a more careful reading of the lines that the boys' heads are bowed *As they write* and that they are unlikely to be performing the formal action of a respectful bow whilst at the same time writing. The word *bowed*, here, simply describes the angle at which the boys held their heads as they huddled over their work. The lesson to be drawn here is, again, the importance of reading in context and to avoid the temptation of extracting a single word for scrutiny, drawing only on personal knowledge of that word in order to construct a meaning, rather than seeing it in its context.

It was, however, warming to see candidates responding to the teacher's feelings of satisfaction – joy, even – in his pupils' sense of achievement. The water imagery in the poet's use of *waves*, *stream*, *ripple* and *laves* to describe the passage of knowledge and learning from himself to the boys was grasped by many and even linked back to the water imagery of the shoreline in the first stanza, seeing it as an extension of the same metaphor. One candidate likened the flow of water/knowledge to a river which is often connected to journeys, seeing the boys' academic progress as a 'journey' of personal development. Similarly, the image of the boys as birds and the teacher as providing the *grain* of learning drew much attention and comment. Most grasped that this was a positive image of the boys' eagerness to glean a morsel of knowledge from the teacher and return quickly with it to incorporate into their work. Some, however, became distracted by the words *steal and flee*, entering into a moral admonition of the boys for their bad behaviour. Again, this is occurred when candidates searched for meaning in very small 'chunks' of text, taking the writer's individual language choices out of context with the mood of the piece as a whole. It is important, therefore, to encourage students to think carefully about the mood or tone of a poem and about the stance of the 'voice' before making decisions about meaning in regards to individual elements of the text.

The third bullet asked for some consideration of the final two stanzas of the poem, and most candidates managed to find something to say about their significance. It is good practice to train students always to aim to include a comment on a poem's ending, as it is here that a poet will often draw together the poem's key ideas into some kind of reflective whole, articulating the 'message' of the poem. Even if a point about

something in the main body of the poem has to be sacrificed owing to time constraints, it is usually worth choosing to spend that time on the poem's ending. Moving to the key image, trees were seen by some candidates as representing wisdom (trees live a long time) and the teacher was often seen as the 'tree of knowledge'. The pupils, of course, were the tendrils which are young shoots seeking support, just like the pupils seek support and mentoring from their teacher. There were some particularly poignant comments on how the boys and teacher seem to merge, their lives entwining with each other as the boys carry bits of the teacher within them into their future lives and the teacher takes ownership of their joys, which he shares. One candidate pondered this image in a wider sense, saying: *Many people are responsible for ensuring the children grow into responsible adults; each is a leaf on their trees.*

Candidates should be reminded about the unnecessary use of ineffectual introductions. As a rule, introductions should be brief and say something meaningful about the content of the actual poem under discussion. The least successful openings this session often began *In this essay I will …* and then went on to produce a list of technical features that, purportedly, by their very use strikingly conveyed the writer's thoughts and feelings. For example: *In this essay I will analyse how the writer conveys his thoughts and feelings about his lessons through his use of various techniques such as imagery and description.* Often, introductions like this will continue on to lay out what the candidate intends to look at, which in fact turns out to be a verbatim copy of the bullet points. The time taken to write an introduction like this considered against the amount of reward it attracts (none) provides a poor return on the candidate's time and effort.

A more effective introduction from one candidate was the following:
The poem 'The Best of School' explores the lasting impact a teacher can have on a student's life. It also presents school from the perspective of a passionate teacher reflecting on a lesson. The poet compares the lesson to a day at the beach and acknowledges the students' reliance on him. In the final two stanzas the poet looks to the future and his impact on the rest of the boys' lives.

Here, this candidate has demonstrated a secure grasp of the key elements of the poem in a succinct summary of it, has touched on the writer's use of imagery and has mentioned the impact of the final two stanzas. All comments are kept general as we know that detailed analysis will follow. It would, of course, be unrealistic to expect all candidates to have the ability to produce such an effective opening statement, but teachers are advised to steer their learners away from trite, rehearsed *In this essay I will be …* type of openers and to encourage students to include at least some sort of overview of what they understand the poem to be about. If even this is beyond some students who are still developing their analytical abilities, it is probably a good idea to advise them to dispense with the idea of an introduction altogether and to move straight into their first key point in their opening sentence: time will be saved to spend on more thoughtful, sincere comment on the poem and they will not be penalised for lack of a formal introduction.

Question 2

'Achak the refugee'

How does the writer vividly convey to you Achak's experiences?

To help you answer this question, you might consider:

- the challenges of crossing the river
- the portrayal of Achak's interactions with others
- the way the writer conveys Achak's thoughts and feelings after arriving in Ethiopia.

Most candidates found the passage accessible and were able to show a grasp of its content, following the narrative of Achak's journey from Sudan to Ethiopia. The bullets invited a sequential move through the passage and many adopted this approach to the text, starting with the river crossing, looking at Achak's trades with the boys in the village and ending on his reactions to the group's arrival in Ethiopia. A basic understanding of the text supported by textual detail and quotation was as far as some responses went, but in order to gain access to the higher band marks, the real key to success was a considered response to the word 'vividly' in the question; this word, of course, requires candidates to think about the writer at work, consciously crafting language for effect.

A successful approach to the opening section of the passage was for candidates to recognise, prompted by the first bullet, what the challenges facing the boys actually were. The fact that the river was *wide and deep*, making the crossing difficult and potentially dangerous was noted, and that the boys faced a lack of help or cooperation from the villagers who would not allow them to use their boats. The threat posed by the

crocodiles was often cited and some candidates commented on the fact that when the boys entered the water, *those crocodiles chose to enter the water too*. Many responses that used this quotation tended to leave it at that, or to simply repeat that this made the crossing dangerous. However, a moment's pause to look at the word *chose* in the quotation would have demonstrated a more active engagement with language and how it works. A little comment on the fact that the word *chose* suggests that the crocodiles had made a conscious decision to enter the water immediately the boys entered would have helped here. Some reflection on the effect – that this makes the crocodiles sound predatory, as if they were preparing to attack and eat the boys – would have dug even deeper still. It was noticeable that in many essays candidates were able and willing to make a point and support it with quotation, but there was a general reluctance to go back into cited quotation to explore exactly how language achieves its effects on the reader. It is advisable to encourage this habit: if a quotation is written down, it should always be followed up by some sort of comment on the language in it or on exactly how it achieves its overall effect. This reluctance to explore language and imagery and the mechanics of how it works was, unfortunately, what kept many candidates from achieving reward in the higher mark bands.

The consideration of the challenges facing the boys often ended with the observation that many of the boys were unable to swim and had to be pulled across by those who could and that this made the crossing very dangerous. This often ended the analysis of the challenges and many candidates then moved on to the next bullet. However, there were some responses that took time to consider the *structural* impact of this list of challenges, noting that there is a cumulative effect in the listing of them, and that the difficulties seem to increase in risk as they are introduced, making this crossing seem more and more impossible. This ability to take a broader view of the text and look at emerging patterns is a higher order skill and one that attracts reward from the examiner; training students to look for structural patterns like this in the content (and not just in the layout) of a text is a useful way to improve candidate attainment.

In addressing the second bullet – Achak's interactions with others – many pointed out that Achak seems quite alone and detached from the other boys as he wanders from house to house in search of food, though no one picked up on the fact that the writer uses the phrase *real food* in the text, suggesting that what the boys had been living on during the course of their journey was probably at a basic sustenance level like fruit, berries, roots, etc., illustrating their desperate hunger. The ability to read inferentially is another higher order reading skill that will attract reward and is one that should be encouraged. Some answers went on to comment on the hostility of the village boy's addresses to Achak – *You, boy, where are you from?* and *I want your shirt*. – and noted the plainness of this speech, even its monosyllabic structure, which demonstrated an excellent engagement with tone and how it is achieved.

The following paragraph of the text allowed opportunities for candidates to step out of analysis of the immediate narrative for a moment to look at Achak's reflections on the events being described. For example: *When we arrived there* (the refugee camp) *I would curse my decision to trade my shirt for a cup of maize.* This time shift in the narrative, voiced by an Achak who is at least three years older than the boy in the events being described, reminds the reader that the story is being narrated as a reflection on past events and so the writer is thus able to provide a narrative hook about Achak's future regret of his decision. Although many candidates were able to follow the basic details about the trade of Achak's shirt and the reasons for his regret, few were able to analyse this event at a structural level, which would have moved the discussion onto a higher level.

Achak's ultimate disappointment about what he finds on the group's arrival in Ethiopia was grasped by all, except a few candidates who appeared to run out of time before they could address the ending of the passage. Many described Achak as being 'in denial' about actually being in Ethiopia and that he thought Kur was making a joke. These observations were supported with a little detail or quotation from the text. This was fine as a demonstration of understanding at a basic level. Only those candidates who could analyse the mechanics of the writing, however, were able to move their discussion into a type of analysis that moved their essays up the bands. There was very useful comment from some candidates on the writer's use of negatives in Achak's speech: *No, I said …*/*… no homes*/*… no medical facilities*/*… No food*/*No water*/*This is not that place*, and if the candidate also mentioned the repetition in close succession of these negatives, then all the better. It is worth saying here that the most effective comments not only pointed out that the writer *uses* negatives and repetition, but they also provided specific quotation like that above to illustrate this point. Achak's final repetition of *This is not that place* was used by several candidates to point out the completeness of his disappointment, using this to bring their discussions to a close.

A final word must be said on the quality of essay introductions as there seemed this session to be a return to rather stilted and empty essay openers. Least successful were introductions that began with a simple recount of the story's content followed by: *In this essay, I will argue about how the writer vividly conveys to the reader Achak's experience*, (a straightforward repetition of the stem question) followed by a list of areas

of the text that were to be studied which actually turned out to be a verbatim copying out of the bullet points. Introductions like this rarely demonstrated any real contact with the text or its ideas. A better way into a response was demonstrated by the following candidate's effort: *In the passage, Achak's experience is conveyed as both frightening yet exciting as he – with the other boys – begins to enter the unknown. Towards the end of the passage, however, this feeling of excitement is perceived as short lived and converted instead into utter disappointment.*

Here, there is engagement not only with the general movement of the narrative, but also with its tone. If the candidate had included some indication of the subject of the story (fleeing refugees), this would have proved to be a very good way into the essay proper.

Conclusions were equally problematic for many candidates who resorted to providing a straightforward list of all the previous points covered, leading to overly-detailed repetition of material already presented. Examiners can only reward the same material once, so this approach proved to be a fruitless use of precious time that could otherwise have been more profitably spent on another paragraph of fresh analysis. Conclusions – if included at all, and they are by no means obligatory – should be brief (a single sentence is ideal), general, and perhaps sum up a candidate's personal response to the text. The following was one of the most effective conclusions seen this series: *The writer adds that 'Sudanese adults' were scattered across the fields of Ethiopia, symbolising that although the boys endured a tiresome journey, the fate that they sought to outrun was already ahead of them and was unavoidable.*

Not all candidates, of course, are able to produce such a sharp and succinct summative comment. Instead of offering an ineffective, repetitive conclusion, good advice would be to assure candidates that they can dispense with a formal conclusion altogether and simply provide a paragraph of analysis from near the ending of the passage, which will do the job much more effectively instead.

WORLD LITERATURE

Paper 0408/31
Paper 3: Set Text

Key messages

Successful responses:

- Show a detailed knowledge of texts.
- Focus explicitly on the key words of the question.
- Use relevant textual references to support the points made.
- Engage with the ways in which writers achieve their effects.

Less successful responses:

- Have an insecure or limited knowledge of texts.
- Introduce irrelevant material (including extraneous background material).
- Make assertions which are not substantiated.
- Merely log or describe writers' techniques.

General comments

There was much evidence of outstanding work this session, where candidates showed both sensitive engagement with, and enjoyment of, the poetry and prose texts they had studied. This work demonstrated insight and originality without relying on pre-learned approaches. There were very few rubric infringements, and the majority of candidates divided their time well across their two answers for the paper. The two most common problems arose from a lack of focus on the question set and a lack of specific reference to support points in **Section B** essay questions.

The strongest answers showed an impressively detailed knowledge of the text, with candidates skilfully integrating concise quotation and textual references to support their ideas. For the extract-based questions on prose and drama texts, the most successful responses explored the writing in the extracts in considerable and sensitive detail; they also were able to provide some comment on the position of the extract within the wider text. Those who knew their texts well and who had learned some key quotations were better able to provide support for their **Section B** general essay. Without the necessary detail, candidates found it difficult to move beyond basic, at times overly assertive and unconvincing responses.

Words such as '*striking*', '*memorable*' and '*powerful*' are used in IGCSE Literature questions to elicit a personal response to qualities of the writing, and the most successful responses addressed key words such as these. Less successful responses sometimes made cursory reference to the key word before embarking on a character sketch or general commentary on themes with little regard to the particular thrust of the question. There were instances in responses to *Nervous Conditions* and *A Doll's House* of candidates making contextual points that took them away from the main focus of the question.

The strongest responses explored with some sensitivity and individuality the ways in which writers conveyed meanings and achieved effects. There was, however, an increase in the number of candidates who wrongly identified the literary form of the text: poetry, drama or prose fiction. Such errors indicate a lack of appreciation of an important aspect of a text. There were instances of *A Doll's House* being referred to as a book rather than play, which led candidates to focus more on the issues of the text than the qualities of the text as a drama to be performed on the stage in front of an audience.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1 – Dangarembga

Many responses observed Tambu's admiration for her aunt and the similarity between the two characters in the value they assign to education. These responses captured something of Maiguru's bitterness and also her ultimate resignation to her fate. The stronger responses explored Tambu's changing thoughts during the extract and, in particular, Tambu's verdict on Maiguru '*effacing*' herself. The most successful responses analysed closely the effects of narrative viewpoint and the presentation of dialogue within the extract. Less successful responses worked through the extract in an explanatory way, sometimes making broad assertions about context.

Question 2 – Ibsen

Most responses were able to chart the progress through this busy scene, usually commenting on Nora's thoughts on the roles of daughter and wife at the start of the extract and the language and actions of Torvald at the end of the extract. Much was made of the domestic setting at Christmas and Nora's affection for the children, undercut some argued by her breaking her promise to play with them. The more successful responses explored closely the effects of Krogstad's threats on Nora and the impact on the audience of her lying (and her telling the children to lie) about Krogstad's presence. Less successful responses provided explanations of character and situation without reflecting on the impact of the drama on an audience.

Question 3 – Richardson

Too few responses were made to this question to make meaningful comment.

Question 4 – Songs of Ourselves

Too few responses were made to this question to make meaningful comment.

Question 5 – Sophocles

Too few responses were made to this question to make meaningful comment.

Question 6 – Stories of Ourselves

Most answers focused on the opening paragraph's exploration of what it is to be a stranger in a foreign country, the importance of the moment when Mala and her husband '*for the first time ... looked at each other and smiled*', and the significance to the narrator of the six weeks he spent at Mrs Croft's. The most successful responses selected details judiciously from the extract as they explored closely aspects of language, structure and narrative viewpoint in determining the extent to which they found the story's ending so satisfying. Some of the strongest responses analysed the ways in which the penultimate paragraph presented a deft pen portrait of their contented lives in middle age in the narrator's third and final continent.

Section B

Question 7 – Dangarembga

Many answers focused on Tambu's uncompromising honesty about her feelings for her brother Nhamo and his death, and on her attitude towards both her father and mother. Many commented on what they saw as her admirable sense of determination to receive a proper education in spite of the limitations placed on women's aspirations by the patriarchal society in which she grew up. Stronger responses explored the ways in which Dangarembga conveyed Tambu's growing confidence and independence, and the ways in which narrative viewpoint made clear her thoughts and feelings about the oppression of women in her culture.

Question 8 – Ibsen

Most answers commented on key differences in their lives: Nora's province being that of the home and family; Helmer's that of the world of work. Many candidates noted the role reversal, though only a few were able to marshal detailed, precise references to the text to support the points they made. Many responses

were, therefore, overly-dependent on unsubstantiated assertions, including vague assertions made about gender roles. The strongest responses were able to provide the necessary compelling evidence of the husband's patronising attitude towards his wife and also to explore the dramatic impact of the lead-up to Nora's shocking departure, and its effect on Helmer.

Question 9 – Richardson

Too few responses were made to this question to make meaningful comment.

Question 10 – Songs of Ourselves

Too few responses were made to this question to make meaningful comment.

Question 11 – Sophocles

Too few responses were made to this question to make meaningful comment.

Question 12 – Stories of Ourselves

There was in many answers a tendency to describe the events in the story and the key character traits of mother and son. Most responses showed an understanding of the central accusation concerning the missing earrings, the mother's sense of hurt and pride, and her son's bitterness. Only the strongest responses were able to tailor their material to the focus of the question: the ways in which Winton memorably conveys injustice. These responses were more assured in their analysis of the ways in which Winton depicts the accuser, her home and what is revealed about her social class, from the perspective of the son.

WORLD LITERATURE

Paper 0408/32
Paper 3: Set Text

Key messages

Successful responses:

- show a detailed knowledge of texts
- focus explicitly on the key words of the question
- use relevant textual references to support the points made
- engage with the ways in which writers achieve their effects.

Less successful responses:

- have an insecure or limited knowledge of texts
- introduce irrelevant material (including extraneous background material)
- make assertions which are not substantiated
- merely log or describe writers' techniques.

General comments

There was much evidence of outstanding work this session, where candidates showed both sensitive engagement with, and enjoyment of, the poetry and prose texts they had studied. This work demonstrated insight and originality without relying on pre-learned approaches. There were very few rubric infringements, and the majority of candidates divided their time well across their two answers for the paper. The two most common problems arose from a lack of focus on the question set and a lack of specific reference to support points in ***Section B*** essay questions.

The strongest answers showed an impressively detailed knowledge of the text, with candidates skilfully integrating concise quotation and textual references to support their ideas. For the extract-based questions on prose and drama texts, the most successful responses explored the writing in the extracts in considerable and sensitive detail; they also were able to provide some comment on the position of the extract within the wider text. Those who knew their texts well and who had learned some key quotations were better able to provide support for their Section B general essay. Without the necessary detail, candidates found it difficult to move beyond basic, at times overly assertive and unconvincing responses.

Words such as '*striking'*, '*memorable'* and '*powerful'* are used in IGCSE Literature questions to elicit a personal response to qualities of the writing, and the most successful responses addressed key words such as these. Less successful responses sometimes made cursory reference to the key word before embarking on a character sketch or general commentary on themes with little regard to the particular thrust of the question. There were instances in responses to *Nervous Conditions* and *A Doll's House* of candidates making contextual points that took them away from the main focus of the question.

The strongest responses explored with some sensitivity and individuality the ways in which writers conveyed meanings and achieved effects. There was, however, an increase in the number of candidates who wrongly identified the literary form of the text: poetry, drama or prose fiction. Such errors indicate a lack of appreciation of an important aspect of a text. There were instances of *A Doll's House* and *Oedipus the King* being referred to as a 'book' rather than 'play', which led candidates to focus more on the issues of the text than the qualities of the text as a drama to be performed on the stage in front of an audience.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1: Dangarembga

Most answers commented on Tambu's determination to sell her produce to pay for her education and the support provided by Mr Matimba. There were many references to racial segregation and apartheid, though comments were often generalised rather than focused on an exploration of the writing. The strongest responses contained close analysis of what the direct speech and actions reveal about Doris as the extract progresses; in particular, they explored how Dangarembga uses language to reveal ideas about class and race.

Question 2: Ibsen

Most answers mentioned Nora's obvious fear of Krogstad's letter and her increasingly desperate attempts at distracting Helmer. Many quoted Torvald's '…you are dancing as though your life depended on it' and commented on the impact of her reply 'It does'. The strongest responses went further than simply identifying feelings such as her fear, anxiety and panic by considering Ibsen's use of dialogue and action during this extract: the wildness and frenzy of Nora's dancing and the impact and significance of Nora's words at the end of the extract. These strong responses viewed the extract as a moment on stage during a performance rather than as pages from a book.

Question 3: Richardson

Too few responses were made to this question to make meaningful comment.

Question 4: Songs of Ourselves

Too few responses were made to this question to make meaningful comment.

Question 5: Sophocles

The most successful responses sustained a clear focus on the ways in which Sophocles builds tension at this moment in the play, exploring the gradual realisation by Oedipus that he is indeed to blame, and considered the significance of the final line of extract for the rest of the play. Less successful responses drifted from the main thrust of the question, with some opting to work through key themes in the extract. Many candidates used terms relating to Greek tragedy (hamartia, anagnorisis, catharsis) which sometimes led to a descriptive approach that took candidates away from a close *analysis* of the build-up of tension, which is the focus of the question.

Question 6: Stories of Ourselves

Too few responses were made to this question to make meaningful comment.

Section B

Question 7: Dangarembga

Too few responses were made to this question to make meaningful comment.

Question 8: Ibsen

Most responses commented on Helmer's role as the head of a typical middle-class family and blamed him and the backdrop of a patriarchal society for the miserable life Nora leads. Stronger responses used much well-selected reference to explore the patronising ways in which Helmer addresses his wife, his sermonising on the corruption of life and his savage denunciation of Nora the moment her deception is revealed. Many responses opted for an element of balance in their answers, pointing out the impact on him of both Nora's deception and of her departure at the end of the play. In 'How far?' questions, candidates are free to take whatever line they wish, so long as they are substantiated by pertinent textual reference.

Question 9: Richardson

Too few responses were made to this question to make meaningful comment.

Question 10: Songs of Ourselves

Too few responses were made to this question to make meaningful comment.

Question 11: Sophocles

Most responses commented on the unsettled relationship between Oedipus and Creon, and drew upon key moments in the play: Creon sent to the oracle by Oedipus to see how to end the plague in Thebes; Oedipus charging Creon (and Tiresias) with plotting against him; the later Oedipus pleading with Creon to have him killed. The strongest responses went beyond character sketch and considered the dramatic impact of Creon's function as a messenger and of the dialogue between the two characters in key moments in the play. Less detailed responses often mentioned a reversal in roles towards the end of the play, but only the strongest responses were able to explore the impact of the dialogue between the two in their last exchange in the play. The usual terms relating to Greek tragedy were deployed, integrated concisely and aptly in successful responses, though as mere feature-logging in less successful responses.

Question 12: Stories of Ourselves

Too few responses were made to this question to make meaningful comment.

WORLD LITERATURE

Paper 0408/33
Paper 3: Set Text

Key messages

Successful responses:

- show a detailed knowledge of texts
- focus explicitly on the key words of the question
- use relevant textual references to support the points made
- engage with the ways in which writers achieve their effects.

Less successful responses:

- have an insecure or limited knowledge of texts
- introduce irrelevant material (including extraneous background material)
- make assertions which are not substantiated
- merely log or describe writers' techniques.

General comments

There was much evidence of outstanding work this session, where candidates showed both sensitive engagement with, and enjoyment of, the poetry and prose texts they had studied. This work demonstrated insight and originality without relying on pre-learned approaches. There were very few rubric infringements, and the majority of candidates divided their time well across their two answers for the paper. The two most common problems arose from a lack of focus on the question set and a lack of specific reference to support points in ***Section B*** essay questions.

The strongest answers showed an impressively detailed knowledge of the text, with candidates skilfully integrating concise quotation and textual references to support their ideas. For the extract-based questions on prose and drama texts, the most successful responses explored the writing in the extracts in considerable and sensitive detail; they also were able to provide some comment on the position of the extract within the wider text. Those who knew their texts well and who had learned some key quotations were better able to provide support for their Section B general essay. Without the necessary detail, candidates found it difficult to move beyond basic, at times overly assertive and unconvincing responses.

Words such as '*striking'*, '*memorable'* and '*powerful'* are used in IGCSE Literature questions to elicit a personal response to qualities of the writing, and the most successful responses addressed key words such as these. Less successful responses sometimes made cursory reference to the key word before embarking on a character sketch or general commentary on themes with little regard to the particular thrust of the question. There were instances in responses to *Nervous Conditions* and *A Doll's House* of candidates making contextual points that took them away from the main focus of the question.

The strongest responses explored with some sensitivity and individuality the ways in which writers conveyed meanings and achieved effects. There was, however, an increase in the number of candidates who wrongly identified the literary form of the text: poetry, drama or prose fiction. Such errors indicate a lack of appreciation of an important aspect of a text. There were instances of *A Doll's House* and *Oedipus the King* being referred to as a 'book' rather than 'play', which led candidates to focus more on the issues of the text than the qualities of the text as a drama to be performed on the stage in front of an audience.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1: Dangarembga

Most answers commented on Tambu's determination to sell her produce to pay for her education and the support provided by Mr Matimba. There were many references to racial segregation and apartheid, though comments were often generalised rather than focused on an exploration of the writing. The strongest responses contained close analysis of what the direct speech and actions reveal about Doris as the extract progresses; in particular, they explored how Dangarembga uses language to reveal ideas about class and race.

Question 2: Ibsen

Most answers mentioned Nora's obvious fear of Krogstad's letter and her increasingly desperate attempts at distracting Helmer. Many quoted Torvald's '…you are dancing as though your life depended on it' and commented on the impact of her reply 'It does'. The strongest responses went further than simply identifying feelings such as her fear, anxiety and panic by considering Ibsen's use of dialogue and action during this extract: the wildness and frenzy of Nora's dancing and the impact and significance of Nora's words at the end of the extract. These strong responses viewed the extract as a moment on stage during a performance rather than as pages from a book.

Question 3: Richardson

Too few responses were made to this question to make meaningful comment.

Question 4: Songs of Ourselves

Too few responses were made to this question to make meaningful comment.

Question 5: Sophocles

The most successful responses sustained a clear focus on the ways in which Sophocles builds tension at this moment in the play, exploring the gradual realisation by Oedipus that he is indeed to blame, and considered the significance of the final line of extract for the rest of the play. Less successful responses drifted from the main thrust of the question, with some opting to work through key themes in the extract. Many candidates used terms relating to Greek tragedy (hamartia, anagnorisis, catharsis) which sometimes led to a descriptive approach that took candidates away from a close *analysis* of the build-up of tension, which is the focus of the question.

Question 6: Stories of Ourselves

Too few responses were made to this question to make meaningful comment.

Section B

Question 7: Dangarembga

Too few responses were made to this question to make meaningful comment.

Question 8: Ibsen

Most responses commented on Helmer's role as the head of a typical middle-class family and blamed him and the backdrop of a patriarchal society for the miserable life Nora leads. Stronger responses used much well-selected reference to explore the patronising ways in which Helmer addresses his wife, his sermonising on the corruption of life and his savage denunciation of Nora the moment her deception is revealed. Many responses opted for an element of balance in their answers, pointing out the impact on him of both Nora's deception and of her departure at the end of the play. In 'How far?' questions, candidates are free to take whatever line they wish, so long as they are substantiated by pertinent textual reference.

Question 9: Richardson

Too few responses were made to this question to make meaningful comment.

Question 10: Songs of Ourselves

Too few responses were made to this question to make meaningful comment.

Question 11: Sophocles

Most responses commented on the unsettled relationship between Oedipus and Creon, and drew upon key moments in the play: Creon sent to the oracle by Oedipus to see how to end the plague in Thebes; Oedipus charging Creon (and Tiresias) with plotting against him; the later Oedipus pleading with Creon to have him killed. The strongest responses went beyond character sketch and considered the dramatic impact of Creon's function as a messenger and of the dialogue between the two characters in key moments in the play. Less detailed responses often mentioned a reversal in roles towards the end of the play, but only the strongest responses were able to explore the impact of the dialogue between the two in their last exchange in the play. The usual terms relating to Greek tragedy were deployed, integrated concisely and aptly in successful responses, though as mere feature-logging in less successful responses.

Question 12: Stories of Ourselves

Too few responses were made to this question to make meaningful comment.