

# LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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**Paper 0992/05**  
**Coursework**

There were too few candidates for a meaningful report to be produced.

# LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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<p><b>Paper 0992/12</b> <b>Poetry and Prose 12</b></p>
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## **Key messages**

In successful responses, candidates:

- Show a clear understanding of the detail of texts.
- Select material that addresses the question.
- Integrate well-selected references to support their responses.
- Explore sensitively ways in which writers achieve their effects.
- Write personal responses to texts, informed by relevant textual detail.

In less successful responses, candidates:

- Show only a basic grasp of surface meanings.
- Unload 'themes' they have prepared without focusing on the question's key words.
- Use long quotations or a list of shorter quotations without analysis of specific words.
- Spot writing devices without exploring the effects created.
- Are overly dependent on explanation and assertion.

## **General comments**

There was some evidence of outstanding work this session in which the most successful candidates explored texts with insight and individuality. There were some examples of candidates who spent too much time on their first response, which adversely affected their performance on their second question. Some candidates showed confidence in answering their poetry question where they could refer to the poem printed in the question paper but wrote less successfully on their general essay question which required the memorising of relevant textual detail.

Although most candidates were familiar with the layout of the paper, there were examples of candidates answering several questions rather than two. There were instances, too, of candidates relying exclusively on the extracts printed in the prose passage-based questions when answering the prose general essay questions; this approach was self-limiting. Most candidates wrote in legible handwriting; this is essential in communicating their ideas clearly to Examiners, and it is important that teachers remind candidates about this.

The strongest responses were those in which candidates addressed the question. As explained in previous reports, this is an essential aspect of the examination: questions are not to be regarded as mere prompts for candidates to unload exhaustively their knowledge of the poem or character or theme mentioned in the question. Candidates should tailor their material to meet the specific demands of the question.

Successful answers began by engaging with the key words of the question. This is a sensible strategy when writing an examination answer in 45 minutes. Those candidates who wrote a brief plan (often using a bulleted list or mind map) before starting their answer tended to produce more clearly organised responses. There were again this session candidates who offered lengthy introductions, with extraneous biographical or social context material that simply delayed the actual start of their answer to the question. Again, some candidates were determined to state the themes they had studied at the start of their answers and occasionally during their answer even when this was not relevant to the question that had been asked. This approach wastes candidates' time.

The most convincing personal responses embedded textual references to support the points being made. It was clear that many candidates had learned much direct quotation to use in answering the prose general essay questions. This not only provided support and evidence but also gave candidates the opportunity to explore ways in which writers use language. The least successful responses to these questions were characterised by an over-reliance on unsupported assertion.

Teachers should remind candidates of their responsibility to provide specific supporting detail from the text and not simply line references. There were instances of candidates directing Examiners to lines in poems and extracts without making it clear which word or phrase was being referred to. Some candidates used ellipses in the middle of quotations, presumably to shorten them, but they left out the actual word(s) that would support the point being made. These candidates would have benefited from quoting the word(s) they needed to support their point and avoiding the use of ellipsis altogether.

There was again this session much evidence of logging features without close analysis of *precise* ways in which writers uses these devices to create *specific* effects. As was the case in previous sessions, the most assertive and least effective comments related to enjambment and caesurae, with unsupported generalisations made about speeding up or slowing down the pace of a poem.

### **Comments on specific questions**

#### **Section A**

##### **Question 1**

Most responses showed an understanding of the speaker's fear that death is always close and his regret that people leave so few 'lovely' memories. Many commented on the bleakness of the diction: 'crushed', 'doom', 'death', 'peril'. Less successful responses did not recognise that 'some hand' refers to an anonymous person and that the speaker is reflecting on that person's accidental killing of a fly. The more successful responses explored the language used to convey the speaker's fascination with the fly's wings ('gleam out', 'lustre') and were able to offer some interpretation of 'fair monument' and 'pure relics of a blameless life'. There was much confident analysis of the contrast between the fly and humans.

##### **Question 2**

Many candidates were able to make supported references to the precise and detailed descriptions of the baby. They understood the contrast between the complexity of the baby and the simplicity and crudeness of the spirit. Less successful responses tended to work through the poem explaining its content, though without achieving a clear focus on the question. The most successful responses tailored their material to address the key words 'fascinating poem', exploring ways in which Stevenson conveys feelings and passions as inaccurate and unskilful. They also explored the use of command words in capturing the speaker's tone of voice.

##### **Question 3**

Most candidates were able to understand the idea that learning more leads to a better understanding of the world in contrast to the idea in the first line: 'A little learning is a dangerous thing'. Less successful responses tended to rely on a study guide approach of what the poem (or rather this extract from a longer poem) is about. Explanation and assertion predominated in these responses with little specific reference to the detail of the poem or to the key words 'vividly convey'. By contrast, the more successful responses selected useful concise quotations from the poem to explore ways in which Pope achieves his effects, for example, through the imagery of drinking and intoxication, the use of mountain scenery and references to heights.

##### **Question 4**

There was in most responses a recognition that the speaker is searching through the house for his wife, that she constantly eludes him though he is determined to persist with his quest. Less successful responses provided narrative accounts, often adopting a line-by-line approach. The most successful responses explored the memorable implication that, however well we know someone, there will always be something that cannot be known about them. Some argued that love makes the quest for the essence of the person exciting. The strongest responses explored the use of language and tone in making the poem 'memorable': for example, the image of the house and all its doors, the impressions of what her presence has left behind, and the way the speaker's state of mind is conveyed.

### Question 5

Most answers commented on the magical nature of the experience, in particular, the moment the deer do not move but merely stare at the poet. There was generally an understanding that the experience seems to take the poet into a different dimension, almost unearthly. Stronger responses commented on the metaphor 'the curtain had blown aside for a moment' and how it captured the poet's sense of awe. Some answers explored with some sensitivity the structure of the poem, for example, by charting the movement within the poem, from '(the roe-deer) had happened in my dimension' to 'stared at me' to 'back to the ordinary'.

### Question 6

Most responses recognised that the title refers to the anniversary of the death of the speaker's mother and that Hughes imagines her and her dead sister together, with his mother narrating details from her past. There was reference to the mother's preference for her other son, though this was often asserted rather than supported. Stronger responses explored the way Hughes uses language and tone to convey strong emotions: for example, the images of heaven and angels, the mother's conversational tone and the speaker's reverential and loving tone. The most successful answers selected relevant material from this relatively long poem to address the question's key words 'movingly convey strong emotions'; the least successful responses adopted simple narrative approaches.

### Question 7

Most candidates were aware of the immediate context: that Kambili is staying with Auntie Ifeoma and has met and is entranced by Father Amadi. He asks her about her life and about her father though clearly knows her problems. More successful responses argued that Father Amadi is trying to lift her spirits and her self-esteem and appreciated that this is a key moment in her rite of passage. The strongest responses explored the way Adichie describes the attractiveness of Amadi, their physical closeness and the sense of Kambili being overwhelmed by her attraction to him. Explaining why the moment in the extract is memorable necessarily requires reference to elsewhere in the text, for example, what leads up to this moment or what follows it. Those responses that focused solely on the extract were self-limiting.

### Question 8

There were too few responses to make meaningful comment.

### Question 9

Most candidates recognised the contrast between his confidence that Bidy will agree to marry him and his disappointment that all is not as he expected: the schoolhouse empty, the forge closed though the house is so alive and pretty. The most convincing responses addressed the key word 'vividly' when exploring how Dickens conveys Pip's thoughts and feelings. These responses considered the way Pip's changing feelings are conveyed leading up to the revelation and shock that Joe and Bidy are married. These stronger answers also explored the descriptions of the schoolhouse, forge and house as not matching his expectations. Less successful responses adopted a narrative approach, often not referring to 'Pip's thoughts and feelings' at all.

### Question 10

There were too few responses to make meaningful comment.

### Question 11

Most candidates were aware of the immediate context: Mrs Van Hopper has decided to return to America and orders the narrator to pack for the journey; Maxim asks the narrator to marry him. There was an understanding of her sense of panic. The more successful responses suggested that Maxim's apparent lack of interest (filing his nails) conceals deeper feelings, and they explored the violence of Maxim's reaction to the news of her departure in what it reveals about his character. There were convincing assessments of the casualness of the proposal which, some said, was not really a proposal. Some commented on the patronising tone of 'No, I am asking you to marry me, you little fool.' The strongest responses sustained personal and evaluative engagement with the question, the detail of the extract and relevant links to elsewhere in the novel that makes this extract so 'memorable'. The weakest responses re-told the story of the extract.

### Question 12

There were too few responses to make meaningful comment.

### Question 13

There were too few responses to make meaningful comment.

### Question 14

There were too few responses to make meaningful comment.

### Question 15

There was some understanding in most responses that the Ratliffs do not treat Gogol as a guest even though they are meeting him for the first time and that the food and wine are unfamiliar to him. Most candidates made comparisons with meals that the Gangulis provided for guests, though this focus led some to stray too far from the question's key words 'vividly portray Gogol/Nikhil' to offer general contextual knowledge (prepared before the exam) about differences in culture. The more successful responses sustained a clear focus on the question, with exploration of ways in which Lahiri conveys, for example, Gogol's thoughts about the nature of the meal and his feelings of pleasure at his lucky situation.

### Question 16

Responses were generally characterised by description and assertion. They recognised the importance of Paris and her academic career to Moushumi, her affair with Dimitri and the moment she unwittingly reveals this to Gogol. Much was made of the contrast between her and Gogol: both from the same Bengali background, though she is very much her own person, feeling free to pursue her own life. Responses generally needed to focus more clearly on the key word 'striking' and to use a greater range of textual references to support their responses.

### Question 17

Most candidates recognised that Miranda and Irma are established as important characters, that Mrs Appleyard is a figure of authority and power and that the Rock represents some sort of threat. The strongest responses explored ways in which Lindsay conveys these impressions. There was much sensitive exploration in these responses of Sara portrayed as victim of Appleyard's cruelty. These responses focused on the extravagant description of the latter's figure ('an immense purposeful figure...swimming and billowing in grey silk taffeta') and on the force of her address to the girls (forbidding them to 'engage in any tomboy foolery'). The least successful responses lacked a clear understanding of who the characters are and what situation they are in.

### Question 18

There were too few responses to make meaningful comment.

### Question 19

Most candidates understood the drama of Pi's rescue and the tension of whether Richard Parker would make it. They also commented productively on the structure of the extract, noting the contrast between wanting to save Richard Parker and then wanting to drown him, and the humour arising from this. The most convincing responses were able to contextualise the extract's position within the novel to explore what makes this extract so entertaining. These responses analysed the effect of the repetition in Pi's dialogue and his sudden change of tone in 'Have I gone mad?' Those candidates who interpreted the key word 'entertaining' too narrowly, as perhaps 'hilariously', tended to limit their response.

### Question 20

Most responses showed at least some understanding of the lushness of the island after being so long at sea, Pi's experience of sleeping in the tree with the meerkats and the shocking discovery of the island as carnivorous (the tooth in the tree). Many noted that the experience of the island enables Pi (and Richard Parker) to regain health. There were, however, few answers which provided specific textual evidence for

support. For this general essay question, candidates generally needed a wider range of direct quotations which could have been used not only to support points but also analyse Martel's use of language.

### **Question 21**

The moments which made the extract so entertaining were generally understood, for example, the size and forcefulness of Mrs Jones and the way the boy realises he is beaten and behaves himself. There was much interesting exploration of the implications of poverty in the story and the surprising note of compassion in Mrs Jones's character, which contrasted with the way she is introduced in the opening paragraph. The strongest responses were able to explore ways in which Hughes makes the extract such an entertaining opening to the story by making at least some reference to what happens after the extract. Many candidates clearly enjoyed what they saw as the cartoonish way in which the initial encounter between the characters is conveyed. Less successful responses missed the humour or made generalised comments on gender (e.g. 'women were seen as scared in those days').

### **Question 22**

There were too few responses to make meaningful comment.

# LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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Paper 0992/22  
Drama 22

## Key messages

- Candidates should read the instructions to the question paper carefully, to remind themselves of the requirements for the paper, and be able to select an accurate combination of questions.
- Successful responses focused on the key words in the question and supported ideas with relevant, concise quotations which were analysed fully.
- Successful answers to passage-based questions briefly contextualised the passage, selecting relevant material from across the whole passage and analysed both content and the writer's methods effectively.
- Successful responses to the discursive questions supported their argument with relevant quotations candidates had learned.
- Teachers should refer to the relevant syllabus, and examination requirements, during the planning stages of the course.

## General comments

Many candidates demonstrated knowledge and enjoyment of their set text(s). The most popular texts across all syllabi were *Othello* and *Twelfth Night* followed by *Death and the King's Horseman* and *Crumbs from the Table of Joy*. However, there were very few responses to *Journey's End*. Teachers are advised to check the syllabus carefully for the changes in set texts. This is the last year for both *Twelfth Night* and *Journey's End* which will be replaced in 2024 by William Shakespeare's, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *A Streetcar Named Desire* by Tennessee Williams.

There was some excellent work seen. The most successful responses showed detailed appreciation of texts and made perceptive comments on themes, characterisation and stagecraft. They demonstrated insight into the ways writers achieved effects, focusing closely on the key terms of the question. Textual knowledge was detailed, and these candidates were able to refer to, and quote from, texts effectively with brief, well-chosen quotations, which were fully analysed to consolidate the point being made.

However, there were many less successful answers where there was a lack of basic knowledge of the texts, with much confusion over characters, plot and even with the name and gender of the playwrights. Frequently these responses offered a narrative overview of the text with limited or no focus on the terms of the question. There were considerable rubric infringements reported this year in Paper 2. Candidates appeared to be unaware of the exam requirements to write on two different texts and to answer two questions; an extract-based **Question (a)** and a discursive **(b)** question. All types of rubric infringements were seen: only one answer or too many; two essays on the same text; two **(a)** questions or two **(b)** questions. In instances of rubric infringements, both responses are marked, but only the higher of the two marks is awarded. This results in disappointing results for affected candidates and may be easily avoided if they remind themselves of the exam requirements by reading the instructions on the front of the question paper, before they start to write.

The most successful candidates wrote a brief introduction, focusing on the key terms of the question, for example, 'dramatic', 'memorable' or 'likeable' and sustained a link to the question throughout their answer. Too often candidates write lengthy, general introductions, summarising the plot, listing irrelevant social, cultural and historical detail or the techniques the writer had used. All candidates should deconstruct the questions carefully, before they start to write, to check they have understood what is expected, for example, are they writing about the correct character?

The ability to analyse linguistic and dramatic effects is key to successful responses. Whilst some candidates understood and used literary terminology correctly, for example, foreshadowing and dramatic irony, there remains the tendency to simply point out terms, which is not helpful in developing an argument

constructively. Simply asserting the playwright uses a technique is unlikely to be rewarded: techniques identified should be relevant, supported, and the effects achieved analysed. It is unhelpful for candidates to be stating the obvious, that the writer uses, 'language', 'diction', dialogue, 'end-stopping' or 'caesura' to convey ideas.

The most successful responses demonstrated a constant awareness of the text as performance, referring to the 'audience' rather than 'reader' and the 'play' rather than 'novel', 'text' or 'book'. These were able to explore stagecraft and the authors' methods to convey the main concerns of their chosen texts. Time management was generally good with few unfinished responses seen though there were many very brief answers seen where candidates lacked sufficient knowledge of the texts to write in more detail. Candidates are reminded not to refer to line numbers instead of quoting from the text, and to remember to label their answers clearly, with the question number at the top of their answer.

### **Comments on specific questions**

#### **LYNN NOTTAGE: *Crumbs from the Table of Joy***

##### **Question 1**

- (a) This text was more popular than last year. Most candidates answered the extract-based question which produced the full range of responses. Successful answers established the context, referring to Lily's drunken and dishevelled state, how Godfrey catches her dancing the Mambo with Ermina and Ernestine, and Lily's provocative comments about Father Divine. This context is relevant to establish that the tension is already high at the start of the passage. The best answers centred on the fact that, though Lily and Godfrey have taken steps to escape their previous lives that were marred by family tragedy and racism, they have adopted very different strategies. They explored the clash of attitudes and approaches, with Lily attributing culpability for Sandra's death to Godfrey, and his anger and dramatic, capitalised words, as he physically '*shoves*' the girls out of the room. There was critical understanding of the impact on stage with Godfrey's anger and Lily's retaliation, mocking his beliefs in Father Divine. The tension created by Godfrey's fears of Lily's being a communist were also understood. They also recognised the sexual tension and physical attraction between them, though too often candidates lapsed into speculative comments about their past relationship with some considering this the reason for Sandra's death, missing Lily's intentions in this passage.

In less successful answers candidates struggled to maintain focus on the task, paraphrasing the passage, to give an account of the argument, but without managing to probe more deeply into the text in order to explore the tension between Lily and Godfrey. There were lengthy, inert quotations copied, with candidates asserting that what they had paraphrased conveyed 'tension', but with little understanding of the text quoted.

- (b) There were very few answers to this question and some candidates were unable to recall specific details to develop how Nottage makes Ernestine's graduation a 'memorable and significant' part of the play. It is helpful for candidates to learn some quotations to be able to support responses to discursive questions.

Successful answers understood the importance of the graduation both practical in terms of Ernestine's future, and symbolic in terms of her coming of age, and knew the play well so could support the argument. The best answers could isolate moments where the dress featured; as in the sewing and tearing off of the lace and linked these moments to the evolving relationship between Lily and Ernestine and how she helps Ernestine to mature. There were some moving comments on the dress being a physical representation of her mother, as Sandra, before she died, had chosen a pattern for her graduation dress. The best answers explored how Ernestine's graduation is 'a first' for the family but despite Godfrey's pride, he can only see a job in the bakery or marriage for her. They understood that Ernestine's maturity and ability to break free from his expectations, to reject the job, was both memorable and significant.

Less successful answers were narrative, repetitive and commented on how it was unusual for a black girl to succeed, with the main focus of their writing on the social and historical context of the play but with little understanding of the text, and the significance of Ernestine's achievement in her family, or in her personal development. Weaker answers retold parts of the play with little focus on the question and with limited understanding of the text.



**R C SHERRIFF: *Journey's End***

**Question 2**

- (a) There were fewer answers to this text. Successful answers identified Stanhope's emotions and the reason for them as well as, most importantly, how the writing conveys his emotions. The best answers explored the context of the passage that Stanhope is in a relationship with Raleigh's sister, Madge, and how he earlier revealed to Osborne his fears that Raleigh will reveal his drinking and erratic behaviour to her. They analysed the stage directions and how Stanhope's '*trembling*' showed his extreme anger, fear and inability to control it, as well as the way he tears the letter from Raleigh in such a violent way. Better answers focused on how Sherriff uses stage directions to indicate anger, as well as fear, and many recognised Stanhope's loss of control as symptomatic of the stress he is under. They commented on how he not only loses his temper with Raleigh, but also with poor Osborne, indicative in itself of how Stanhope has lost control. There was critical understanding of how Stanhope's body language in the second half of the scene reflects his sense of embarrassment and shame at how he's behaved, as he '*sits with lowered head*' for the way he treated Raleigh. The best answers fully explored the reading aloud of the letter, focusing on Stanhope's actions and the contrast of him shouting at both Raleigh and Osborne against his '*murmuring*' at the end. The reference to the sun shining outside in the trench was largely ignored but those who attempted comment on the changing mood, did so successfully.

Less successful responses considered the basic elements of the scene: Stanhope shouting and Raleigh's amazement and shock, followed by the contrasting quiet of Osborne reading the letter. It was surprising that some wrote about the passage without reference to the letter or about Stanhope's fears concerning the possible content. Such answers limited themselves, as only a little understanding of the moment was shown. Weaker answers did not convey understanding of why Stanhope was angry, losing focus on the question, and wrote about the previous friendship between Stanhope and Raleigh. Stanhope's behaviour, and demonstration of his authority, was considered important but only as he wanted to show Raleigh that life in the war was different to being at school together, which misses his abuse of his position and the dramatic impact of the moment.

- (b) There were fewer answers to this question and, for some candidates, it proved to be challenging as they confused Hibbert with Trotter. In these answers, there was little to reward as there was limited, relevant, information on the named character.

The most successful answers tended to err on the side of feeling sorry for Hibbert: that his faking his neuralgia was his 'coping mechanism' as drinking was for Stanhope. Others were damning of his perceived cowardice and took a dim view of his selfishness as he prepared to 'let the team down'. The scene when Stanhope threatens to shoot him, and later talks to him, was often used well and served to increase sympathy for Hibbert with the resulting slight change of admiration for him at this point, which is portrayed through the change in feeling in Stanhope. There was some understanding of how during this scene Sherriff implies the significance of camaraderie and friendship and how facing one's fears helps to cope more effectively. The best responses understood how Hibbert's cowardice is used as a foil to reflect Stanhope's bravery and greater honesty in handling his fears – even if via alcohol - but thought that Hibbert was a very weak person and dislikeable character. Further evidence of Hibbert being a contrast to other men is when he boasts of a 'couple of damn fine girls' and showed photographs: this was considered crude and vulgar. Surprisingly few commented on Stanhope's description of Hibbert being a '*little worm*' hoping to '*wriggle back home*'.

Less successful answers were narrative and simply commented on Hibbert's cowardice and general unpleasantness but there was insufficient knowledge of the text and a lack of memorised quotations, and textual reference, to support their responses.

**WOLE SOYINKA: *Death and the King's Horseman***

**Question 3**

- (a) This was the most popular question on Soyinka. Candidates should avoid writing detailed introductions on the historical and cultural setting of the play, and the history of colonialism, leaving little time to respond to the actual question. There were many successful answers which

established the context that Elesin is ashamed of not fulfilling his duty as the King's Horseman and that he is in prison, having been arrested by Pilkings to prevent his suicide. They selected material to focus securely on Elesin's shame: explored the idea of Olunde as an avenger of the shame; Elesin's rejection of Pilkings' consolation; his aggression towards Pilkings, 'white man', covering his shame; the symbolism of 'my voice is broken' and his lost honour as a father and his reputation with the people. There was some insight into his silence and sigh after Pilkings points out that no one goes to their death willingly, and how Elesin blamed everyone else before finally confessing to his own failing. The best answers directly addressed 'powerfully' by responding to the language and the ominous threat of what Olunde will do to the white man: 'His spirit will destroy you and yours' and his comments to his bride that his shame made him blame anyone before he admits he is to blame because it was difficult to let go of his joy in living.

Less successful responses showed insecure understanding of the text and passage. They mistook the context and thought that Elesin knew at this point that Olunde had committed suicide in his place. Some misread the opening speech and thought that Elesin was still ashamed of his son going to England and that his shame here was about that. The weakest responses wrote too much about the context spending much of the answer explaining what had gone before, often inaccurately. Others simply could not select the relevant material sufficiently or just did not focus on the question, writing a character sketch of Elesin or simply retold the plot, often with many inaccuracies.

- (b) This proved difficult for candidates who did not read the question carefully. This question required candidates to write about two dramatic moments in the play, with the rider that candidates did 'not use the passage printed in **Question 3(a)** in answering this question'. Unfortunately, this was ignored with many candidates using the passage as one of the moments. The most successful answers selected two distinct and dramatic moments showing a clear understanding of the play on stage by considering interaction between characters, audience response, action and sound, for example, the drumming, music and rhythmic chanting. These were supported with textual details and quotation candidates had learned. A range of moments were chosen including: the opening scene in the market; the 'Not-I' bird story and Elesin's welcoming response to the bird; the ending scene with Elesin's actual suicide; Amusa's reaction to the egungun costumes and the market women amusingly mocking Amusa.

Less successful responses retold the plot without identifying discrete moments, used the passage, or chose one or two moments to write about, but without focusing on how they were dramatic or supporting with specific textual detail. Weaker responses did not know the text well enough and narrated their moments, often incorrectly, and without comment. Some thought that Soyinka was a character in the market place and referred to him as 'she' and 'her'.

## WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Twelfth Night*

### Question 4

- (a) The most successful answers demonstrated knowledge and understanding of the situation, although some confused Antonio with the Sea Captain who rescues Viola at the beginning of the play. Many candidates were able to recognise that the presentation of Antonio in the passage is problematic in so far as there are contradictory impressions given of him as both a 'pirate' and a loyal and unselfish friend. The best responses were able to contextualise the scene and discuss how Antonio 'saved' Viola/Cesario from her duel and his sense of betrayal having done so much for this 'most ingrateful boy'. Better responses supported their arguments with precise textual reference offering some sensitive analysis of language, exploring the implications of 'Vulcan' and were secure in their knowledge of dramatic irony. Some were able to comment on the fact that when Olivia enters at the end of the scene, Orsino's attention is immediately drawn away from Antonio and he is no longer of any interest or importance to the duke. There was predictably a lot of sympathy for Antonio as well as some discussion about his sexuality.

In less successful answers there was confusion over what was going on in the scene and the issue of mistaken identity. Some candidates struggled to comment on Antonio, a minor character, who appears in only a few scenes. They were confused by the Duke's language about when he last saw Antonio. There was also confusion about the context of this moment; when it took place and who Antonio had rescued. Some were able to identify Antonio's feelings of betrayal but comments about Antonio's relationship with Sebastian ranged from it being brotherly, to openly homosexual with

some candidates losing focus on both the question, and passage, to write about homosexuality in Shakespeare's day.

- (b) This was also a popular question but proved to be problematic where some candidates confused Sir Toby with Sir Andrew or even, in a few cases, Malvolio. Stronger responses engaged with the question and provided plenty of textual detail in support. They provided a balanced response to Sir Toby being 'likeable', though some were quite vehement in their disapproval of his debauched ways. There was a clear understanding of his drunken behaviour, cynical use of Sir Andrew for money and amusement, organising of the duel between Cesario and Sir Andrew, and the cruel way he gained revenge on Malvolio. However, there were very few instances of candidates being able to look at the playwright's methods of presenting the character through the language of the text and the stage craft. Many simply asserted he provides comic-relief but without exploring precisely how Shakespeare conveys this. There was often mention of his involvement in the gulling of Malvolio, but some misunderstanding of the extent of his role.

Less successful answers showed insecure understanding of the character and his behaviour, believing Sir Toby was a loyal and faithful friend to Sir Andrew, unaware of his ulterior motives. Some candidates felt that his care of Olivia was completely unselfish. Weaker candidates simply asserted whether or not he is likeable with little or no support from the text, considering Sir Toby being likeable because he is funny and 'a drunkard'. Candidates tended to write very generalised responses about this character, lacking specific moments and detail to support their points. Weaker responses asserted Sir Toby 'stops the play being boring' and 'keeps the audience awake' but then offered little support for this view, or a link back to the task.

## WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Othello*

### Question 5

- (a) There were many insightful and sensitive responses seen. The most successful answers placed the passage in context, focused sharply on the disturbing nature of the passage and showed a strong sense of audience response. There was understanding that Iago has told Othello he is going to question Cassio about Desdemona, to provide 'ocular proof' of their love affair, when in fact, he questions him about Bianca, and that Othello will be hiding as this conversation occurs. This moment is disturbing because it is not proof, it only appears so to Othello, with grave consequences. They commented on Iago's soliloquy to establish his disturbing intent and manipulative qualities, creating dramatic irony and showing his ability to recognise and use the weaknesses of his victims. Many commented on Iago's 'honesty' in telling Cassio: '*I am a very villain else*', the dramatic irony in his ability to deceive others and how this is disturbing for the audience. Iago's complete lack of empathy, conscience and remorse was cited as disturbing, along with Othello's gullibility and jealousy. Cassio's attitude to Bianca and complete obliviousness to how he is being played by Iago were also cited.

There were some perceptive responses which identified Iago's success in the passage and considered how it fits within his overall plans. They commented on Othello taking on Iago's traits of using animal imagery as he declines into a murderous rage, sealing the fate of Desdemona and nearly eliminating Cassio on the way. Many commented on Iago's disturbing misogyny and the derogatory way that Bianca is spoken about, calling her a 'creature' and deriding her profession, but also saw that Cassio is less of a gentleman than he appeared to be earlier in the play, finding his behaviour towards Bianca reprehensible. Othello's interjections, which reveal his jealousy and increasing anger, leading him to threaten violence were analysed, and the contrast between Othello's heartbreak and Iago and Cassio's light-hearted comments clearly understood.

The least successful answers thought Cassio was talking about Desdemona, that he was married to Bianca and that Othello was part of the conversation. Many had the misconception that Othello compared Cassio to a dog. Others had a basic grasp of Iago's plot but did not comment sufficiently on what was disturbing or on effects. Some candidates worked through the passage failing to focus on the 'disturbing' aspects and were side tracked, writing mainly on the treatment of Bianca, Desdemona and women in general.

- (b) This was less popular and, as with some other character-based questions, some candidates confused Roderigo with Brabantio, Cassio and even Iago. Successful answers balanced the argument. Reasons for sympathy were that his love is unrequited, Brabantio rejects him as a suitor for Desdemona, Iago exploits his weaknesses and gullibility, he loses all his money to Iago and,

ultimately, he is betrayed and murdered. It was pointed out that no-one else recognises Iago's duplicity either so Roderigo cannot be blamed for understanding this too late. On the other hand, he is relentlessly stupid, ignoring Iago telling him '*I am not what I am*', believing him to be a 'friend', and foolishly pursuing a married woman who shows no interest in him whatsoever. Strong answers engaged with his immorality – the racist language to provoke Brabantio, his willingness to start a fight with Cassio and later to agree to kill him. They could support these points with apt quotation and reference to specific moments in the text.

Less successful answers could outline some of the points above and show knowledge of the play but could not refer closely to the text to support ideas. Consequently, responses remained a generalised plea, mainly for sympathy with how he is manipulated. Answers were rather generous to Roderigo taking his 'love' for Desdemona as fact rather than questioning its depth, and some candidates sympathised with his most immoral actions, as if he had no choice or free will.

# LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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Paper 0992/32  
Drama (Open Text) 32

## Key messages

- Candidates should read the instructions to the question paper carefully, to remind themselves of the requirements for the paper, and be able to select an accurate combination of questions.
- Successful responses focused on the key words in the question and supported ideas with relevant, concise quotations which were analysed fully.
- Successful answers to passage-based questions briefly contextualised the passage, selecting relevant material from across the whole passage and analysed both content and the writer's methods effectively.
- Successful responses to the discursive questions supported their argument with relevant quotations candidates had learned.
- Teachers should refer to the relevant syllabus, and examination requirements, during the planning stages of the course.

## General comments

Many candidates demonstrated knowledge and enjoyment of their set text(s). The most popular texts across all syllabi were *Othello* and *Twelfth Night* followed by *Death and the King's Horseman* and *Crumbs from the Table of Joy*. However, there were very few responses to *Journey's End*. Teachers are advised to check the syllabus carefully for the changes in set texts. This is the last year for both *Twelfth Night* and *Journey's End* which will be replaced in 2024 by William Shakespeare's, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *A Streetcar Named Desire* by Tennessee Williams.

There was some excellent work seen. The most successful responses showed detailed appreciation of texts and made perceptive comments on themes, characterisation and stagecraft. They demonstrated insight into the ways writers achieved effects, focusing closely on the key terms of the question. Textual knowledge was detailed, and these candidates were able to refer to, and quote from, texts effectively with brief, well-chosen quotations, which were fully analysed to consolidate the point being made.

However, there were many less successful answers where there was a lack of basic knowledge of the texts, with much confusion over characters, plot and even with the name and gender of the playwrights. Frequently these responses offered a narrative overview of the text with limited or no focus on the terms of the question.

The most successful candidates wrote a brief introduction, focusing on the key terms of the question, for example, 'dramatic', 'memorable' or 'likeable' and sustained a link to the question throughout their answer. Too often candidates write lengthy, general introductions, summarising the plot, listing irrelevant social, cultural and historical detail or the techniques the writer had used. All candidates should deconstruct the questions carefully, before they start to write, to check they have understood what is expected, for example, are they writing about the correct character?

The ability to analyse linguistic and dramatic effects is key to successful responses. Whilst some candidates understood and used literary terminology correctly, for example, foreshadowing and dramatic irony, there remains the tendency to simply point out terms, which is not helpful in developing an argument constructively. Simply asserting the playwright uses a technique is unlikely to be rewarded: techniques identified should be relevant, supported, and the effects achieved analysed. It is unhelpful for candidates to be stating the obvious, that the writer uses, 'language', 'diction', dialogue, 'end-stopping' or 'caesura' to convey ideas.

The most successful responses demonstrated a constant awareness of the text as performance, referring to the 'audience' rather than 'reader' and the 'play' rather than 'novel', 'text' or 'book'. These were able to explore stagecraft and the authors' methods to convey the main concerns of their chosen texts. Time

management was generally good with few unfinished responses seen though there were many very brief answers seen where candidates lacked sufficient knowledge of the texts to write in more detail. Candidates are reminded not to refer to line numbers instead of quoting from the text, and to remember to label their answers clearly, with the question number at the top of their answer.

### Comments on specific questions

#### **LYNN NOTTAGE: *Crumbs from the Table of Joy***

##### **Question 1**

- (a) This text was more popular than last year. Most candidates answered the extract-based question which produced the full range of responses. Successful answers established the context, referring to Lily's drunken and dishevelled state, how Godfrey catches her dancing the Mambo with Ermina and Ernestine, and Lily's provocative comments about Father Divine. This context is relevant to establish that the tension is already high at the start of the passage. The best answers centred on the fact that, though Lily and Godfrey have taken steps to escape their previous lives that were marred by family tragedy and racism, they have adopted very different strategies. They explored the clash of attitudes and approaches, with Lily attributing culpability for Sandra's death to Godfrey, and his anger and dramatic, capitalised words, as he physically '*shoves*' the girls out of the room. There was critical understanding of the impact on stage with Godfrey's anger and Lily's retaliation, mocking his beliefs in Father Divine. The tension created by Godfrey's fears of Lily's being a communist were also understood. They also recognised the sexual tension and physical attraction between them, though too often candidates lapsed into speculative comments about their past relationship with some considering this the reason for Sandra's death, missing Lily's intentions in this passage.

In less successful answers candidates struggled to maintain focus on the task, paraphrasing the passage, to give an account of the argument, but without managing to probe more deeply into the text in order to explore the tension between Lily and Godfrey. There were lengthy, inert quotations copied, with candidates asserting that what they had paraphrased conveyed 'tension', but with little understanding of the text quoted.

- (b) There were very few answers to this question and some candidates were unable to recall specific details to develop how Nottage makes Ernestine's graduation a 'memorable and significant' part of the play. It is helpful for candidates to learn some quotations to be able to support responses to discursive questions.

Successful answers understood the importance of the graduation both practical in terms of Ernestine's future, and symbolic in terms of her coming of age, and knew the play well so could support the argument. The best answers could isolate moments where the dress featured; as in the sewing and tearing off of the lace and linked these moments to the evolving relationship between Lily and Ernestine and how she helps Ernestine to mature. There were some moving comments on the dress being a physical representation of her mother, as Sandra, before she died, had chosen a pattern for her graduation dress. The best answers explored how Ernestine's graduation is 'a first' for the family but despite Godfrey's pride, he can only see a job in the bakery or marriage for her. They understood that Ernestine's maturity and ability to break free from his expectations, to reject the job, was both memorable and significant.

Less successful answers were narrative, repetitive and commented on how it was unusual for a black girl to succeed, with the main focus of their writing on the social and historical context of the play but with little understanding of the text, and the significance of Ernestine's achievement in her family, or in her personal development. Weaker answers retold parts of the play with little focus on the question and with limited understanding of the text.

#### **R C SHERRIFF: *Journey's End***

##### **Question 2**

- (a) There were fewer answers to this text. Successful answers identified Stanhope's emotions and the reason for them as well as, most importantly, how the writing conveys his emotions. The best answers explored the context of the passage that Stanhope is in a relationship with Raleigh's

sister, Madge, and how he earlier revealed to Osborne his fears that Raleigh will reveal his drinking and erratic behaviour to her. They analysed the stage directions and how Stanhope's '*trembling*' showed his extreme anger, fear and inability to control it, as well as the way he tears the letter from Raleigh in such a violent way. Better answers focused on how Sherriff uses stage directions to indicate anger, as well as fear, and many recognised Stanhope's loss of control as symptomatic of the stress he is under. They commented on how he not only loses his temper with Raleigh, but also with poor Osborne, indicative in itself of how Stanhope has lost control. There was critical understanding of how Stanhope's body language in the second half of the scene reflects his sense of embarrassment and shame at how he's behaved, as he '*sits with lowered head*' for the way he treated Raleigh. The best answers fully explored the reading aloud of the letter, focusing on Stanhope's actions and the contrast of him shouting at both Raleigh and Osborne against his '*murmuring*' at the end. The reference to the sun shining outside in the trench was largely ignored but those who attempted comment on the changing mood, did so successfully.

Less successful responses considered the basic elements of the scene: Stanhope shouting and Raleigh's amazement and shock, followed by the contrasting quiet of Osborne reading the letter. It was surprising that some wrote about the passage without reference to the letter or about Stanhope's fears concerning the possible content. Such answers limited themselves, as only a little understanding of the moment was shown. Weaker answers did not convey understanding of why Stanhope was angry, losing focus on the question, and wrote about the previous friendship between Stanhope and Raleigh. Stanhope's behaviour, and demonstration of his authority, was considered important but only as he wanted to show Raleigh that life in the war was different to being at school together, which misses his abuse of his position and the dramatic impact of the moment.

- (b) There were fewer answers to this question and, for some candidates, it proved to be challenging as they confused Hibbert with Trotter. In these answers, there was little to reward as there was limited, relevant, information on the named character.

The most successful answers tended to err on the side of feeling sorry for Hibbert: that his faking his neuralgia was his 'coping mechanism' as drinking was for Stanhope. Others were damning of his perceived cowardice and took a dim view of his selfishness as he prepared to 'let the team down'. The scene when Stanhope threatens to shoot him, and later talks to him, was often used well and served to increase sympathy for Hibbert with the resulting slight change of admiration for him at this point, which is portrayed through the change in feeling in Stanhope. There was some understanding of how during this scene Sherriff implies the significance of camaraderie and friendship and how facing one's fears helps to cope more effectively. The best responses understood how Hibbert's cowardice is used as a foil to reflect Stanhope's bravery and greater honesty in handling his fears – even if via alcohol - but thought that Hibbert was a very weak person and dislikeable character. Further evidence of Hibbert being a contrast to other men is when he boasts of a 'couple of damn fine girls' and showed photographs: this was considered crude and vulgar. Surprisingly few commented on Stanhope's description of Hibbert being a '*little worm*' hoping to '*wriggle back home*'.

Less successful answers were narrative and simply commented on Hibbert's cowardice and general unpleasantness but there was insufficient knowledge of the text and a lack of memorised quotations, and textual reference, to support their responses.

### WOLE SOYINKA: *Death and the King's Horseman*

#### Question 3

- (a) This was the most popular question on Soyinka. Candidates should avoid writing detailed introductions on the historical and cultural setting of the play, and the history of colonialism, leaving little time to respond to the actual question. There were many successful answers which established the context that Elesin is ashamed of not fulfilling his duty as the King's Horseman and that he is in prison, having been arrested by Pilkings to prevent his suicide. They selected material to focus securely on Elesin's shame: explored the idea of Olunde as an avenger of the shame; Elesin's rejection of Pilkings' consolation; his aggression towards Pilkings, '*white man*', covering his shame; the symbolism of '*my voice is broken*' and his lost honour as a father and his reputation with the people. There was some insight into his silence and sigh after Pilkings points out that no one goes to their death willingly, and how Elesin blamed everyone else before finally confessing to his own failing. The best answers directly addressed 'powerfully' by responding to the language

and the ominous threat of what Olunde will do to the white man: *'His spirit will destroy you and yours'* and his comments to his bride that his shame made him blame anyone before he admits he is to blame because it was difficult to let go of his joy in living.

Less successful responses showed insecure understanding of the text and passage. They mistook the context and thought that Elesin knew at this point that Olunde had committed suicide in his place. Some misread the opening speech and thought that Elesin was still ashamed of his son going to England and that his shame here was about that. The weakest responses wrote too much about the context spending much of the answer explaining what had gone before, often inaccurately. Others simply could not select the relevant material sufficiently or just did not focus on the question, writing a character sketch of Elesin or simply retold the plot, often with many inaccuracies.

- (b) This proved difficult for candidates who did not read the question carefully. This question required candidates to write about two dramatic moments in the play, with the rider that candidates did **'not'** use the passage printed in **Question 3(a)** in answering this question'. Unfortunately, this was ignored with many candidates using the passage as one of the moments. The most successful answers selected two distinct and dramatic moments showing a clear understanding of the play on stage by considering interaction between characters, audience response, action and sound, for example, the drumming, music and rhythmic chanting. These were supported with textual details and quotation candidates had learned. A range of moments were chosen including: the opening scene in the market; the 'Not-I' bird story and Elesin's welcoming response to the bird; the ending scene with Elesin's actual suicide; Amusa's reaction to the egungun costumes and the market women amusingly mocking Amusa.

Less successful responses retold the plot without identifying discrete moments, used the passage, or chose one or two moments to write about, but without focusing on how they were dramatic or supporting with specific textual detail. Weaker responses did not know the text well enough and narrated their moments, often incorrectly, and without comment. Some thought that Soyinka was a character in the market place and referred to him as 'she' and 'her'.

## WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Twelfth Night*

### Question 4

- (a) The most successful answers demonstrated knowledge and understanding of the situation, although some confused Antonio with the Sea Captain who rescues Viola at the beginning of the play. Many candidates were able to recognise that the presentation of Antonio in the passage is problematic in so far as there are contradictory impressions given of him as both a 'pirate' and a loyal and unselfish friend. The best responses were able to contextualise the scene and discuss how Antonio 'saved' Viola/Cesario from her duel and his sense of betrayal having done so much for this *'most ingrateful boy'*. Better responses supported their arguments with precise textual reference offering some sensitive analysis of language, exploring the implications of 'Vulcan' and were secure in their knowledge of dramatic irony. Some were able to comment on the fact that when Olivia enters at the end of the scene, Orsino's attention is immediately drawn away from Antonio and he is no longer of any interest or importance to the duke. There was predictably a lot of sympathy for Antonio as well as some discussion about his sexuality.

In less successful answers there was confusion over what was going on in the scene and the issue of mistaken identity. Some candidates struggled to comment on Antonio, a minor character, who appears in only a few scenes. They were confused by the Duke's language about when he last saw Antonio. There was also confusion about the context of this moment; when it took place and who Antonio had rescued. Some were able to identify Antonio's feelings of betrayal but comments about Antonio's relationship with Sebastian ranged from it being brotherly, to openly homosexual with some candidates losing focus on both the question, and passage, to write about homosexuality in Shakespeare's day.

- (b) This was also a popular question but proved to be problematic where some candidates confused Sir Toby with Sir Andrew or even, in a few cases, Malvolio. Stronger responses engaged with the question and provided plenty of textual detail in support. They provided a balanced response to Sir Toby being 'likeable', though some were quite vehement in their disapproval of his debauched ways. There was a clear understanding of his drunken behaviour, cynical use of Sir Andrew for money and amusement, organising of the duel between Cesario and Sir Andrew, and the cruel way



he gained revenge on Malvolio. However, there were very few instances of candidates being able to look at the playwright's methods of presenting the character through the language of the text and the stage craft. Many simply asserted he provides comic-relief but without exploring precisely how Shakespeare conveys this. There was often mention of his involvement in the gulling of Malvolio, but some misunderstanding of the extent of his role.

Less successful answers showed insecure understanding of the character and his behaviour, believing Sir Toby was a loyal and faithful friend to Sir Andrew, unaware of his ulterior motives. Some candidates felt that his care of Olivia was completely unselfish. Weaker candidates simply asserted whether or not he is likeable with little or no support from the text, considering Sir Toby being likeable because he is funny and 'a drunkard'. Candidates tended to write very generalised responses about this character, lacking specific moments and detail to support their points. Weaker responses asserted Sir Toby 'stops the play being boring' and 'keeps the audience awake' but then offered little support for this view, or a link back to the task.

## **WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Othello***

### **Question 5**

- (a) There were many insightful and sensitive responses seen. The most successful answers placed the passage in context, focused sharply on the disturbing nature of the passage and showed a strong sense of audience response. There was understanding that Iago has told Othello he is going to question Cassio about Desdemona, to provide 'ocular proof' of their love affair, when in fact, he questions him about Bianca, and that Othello will be hiding as this conversation occurs. This moment is disturbing because it is not proof, it only appears so to Othello, with grave consequences. They commented on Iago's soliloquy to establish his disturbing intent and manipulative qualities, creating dramatic irony and showing his ability to recognise and use the weaknesses of his victims. Many commented on Iago's 'honesty' in telling Cassio: '*I am a very villain else*', the dramatic irony in his ability to deceive others and how this is disturbing for the audience. Iago's complete lack of empathy, conscience and remorse was cited as disturbing, along with Othello's gullibility and jealousy. Cassio's attitude to Bianca and complete obliviousness to how he is being played by Iago were also cited.

There were some perceptive responses which identified Iago's success in the passage and considered how it fits within his overall plans. They commented on Othello taking on Iago's traits of using animal imagery as he declines into a murderous rage, sealing the fate of Desdemona and nearly eliminating Cassio on the way. Many commented on Iago's disturbing misogyny and the derogatory way that Bianca is spoken about, calling her a 'creature' and deriding her profession, but also saw that Cassio is less of a gentleman than he appeared to be earlier in the play, finding his behaviour towards Bianca reprehensible. Othello's interjections, which reveal his jealousy and increasing anger, leading him to threaten violence were analysed, and the contrast between Othello's heartbreak and Iago and Cassio's light-hearted comments clearly understood.

The least successful answers thought Cassio was talking about Desdemona, that he was married to Bianca and that Othello was part of the conversation. Many had the misconception that Othello compared Cassio to a dog. Others had a basic grasp of Iago's plot but did not comment sufficiently on what was disturbing or on effects. Some candidates worked through the passage failing to focus on the 'disturbing' aspects and were side tracked, writing mainly on the treatment of Bianca, Desdemona and women in general.

- (b) This was less popular and, as with some other character-based questions, some candidates confused Roderigo with Brabantio, Cassio and even Iago. Successful answers balanced the argument. Reasons for sympathy were that his love is unrequited, Brabantio rejects him as a suitor for Desdemona, Iago exploits his weaknesses and gullibility, he loses all his money to Iago and, ultimately, he is betrayed and murdered. It was pointed out that no-one else recognises Iago's duplicity either so Roderigo cannot be blamed for understanding this too late. On the other hand, he is relentlessly stupid, ignoring Iago telling him '*I am not what I am*', believing him to be a 'friend', and foolishly pursuing a married woman who shows no interest in him whatsoever. Strong answers engaged with his immorality – the racist language to provoke Brabantio, his willingness to start a fight with Cassio and later to agree to kill him. They could support these points with apt quotation and reference to specific moments in the text.

Less successful answers could outline some of the points above and show knowledge of the play but could not refer closely to the text to support ideas. Consequently, responses remained a generalised plea, mainly for sympathy with how he is manipulated. Answers were rather generous to Roderigo taking his 'love' for Desdemona as fact rather than questioning its depth, and some candidates sympathised with his most immoral actions, as if he had no choice or free will.

# LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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Paper 0992/42  
Unseen

## Key messages

- Most candidates can make sense of the surface meaning of their chosen text and support this with an appropriate form of textual reference.
- Focused comment on the writer's craft is a key discriminator.
- Analysis of language needs to move beyond identification of effects.
- There is a close link between effects on the reader and a convincing personal response.
- Interpretation needs to move beyond the surface narrative and explore deeper implications.

## General comments

This November session was very successful: Examiners saw little very weak work, and most candidates achieved an impressive understanding of these complex texts using the tools of analysis and response which they have acquired through their Literature courses. Some candidates still struggle to move beyond the literal meaning and surface narrative of their chosen poem or prose passage. For higher marks, they need to give more consideration to how, and why, the writer wrote the text, and what the impact of reading it is on the reader. Teachers should encourage practice with a variety of past paper questions, and in both poetry and prose: too many candidates who choose the prose produce responses which are paraphrases of the narrative, without the analytical approach that is more obvious in responses to poetry.

In this report, it might help centres and teachers to know more about the characteristics of work at different Levels in the mark scheme, and therefore what distinguishes stronger from weaker work.

At the lower Levels from Level 1 to Level 3, candidates are struggling to engage with the text in a literary way, but nevertheless show some basic response. At this level, AO1 (Knowledge of the text supported by appropriate reference) is the Assessment Objective candidates can most easily meet, if they can support their observations with quotations. Significant misreadings usually disqualify candidates from Level 3, as do very fragmentary responses which do not attempt to achieve understanding of the whole text. Quotation is much more effective than paraphrase, but candidates might be advised to keep quotations short in order to give more scope for comment on their content, and perhaps the techniques the writer uses. Attention to the question, guided by the advisory bullet points, can give responses more focus and make them more relevant.

Many responses bunch together in the middle Levels: Level 4 and Level 5. A key discriminator here is the amount of attention to the writer's craft. Candidates in Level 4 might not have a confident overview of the whole text and its meaning, but have some understanding of what is implied, and they usually begin to identify some of the writer's techniques, such as use of imagery or figurative language, use of poetic form and voice, or the choice of narrative perspective and structural development. AO3 (response to language and form) is not the only Assessment Objective assessed in this paper, which tests all literary skills, but the quality of comment on language is a discriminator for Level 5 scripts. It usually drives stronger AO2 (understanding of different possible meanings), as an exploratory approach to the writer's choices and their effects on the reader lead to better overall interpretation of the impact of the text. The key term at this level is 'reasonably developed personal response'. This phrase points to AO4 (interpretation): a developed interpretation is based on evidence and analysis of that evidence which moves beyond identification of literary techniques and considers their emotive purpose.

Just as many more student responses now achieve borderline marks in Level 4, instead of Level 3, Examiners now see more responses in lower Level 6. A key discriminator for this Level and above is 'clear understanding'. These essays are well-developed and show an appreciation of the deeper implications of the text, exploring the writer's purpose as well as their methods. There is a sense of the prose or poem as a literary construct, and that the speaker of the poem or the observer of the narrative passage is not the same

as the writer. These candidates will have used the support in the introductory rubric to put the text into a context, so their response is not purely 'personal'. Their argument will be consistently relevant to the question set, and is likely to have been guided by the bullet points. The second bullet usually encourages focus on an aspect of the writer's craft, so critical attention to this allows the candidate to demonstrate 'a developed response to the way the writer achieves their effects'. The third bullet usually encourages a degree of evaluation, and often asks candidates to consider how a piece of writing ends, and therefore what its ultimate impact is on the reader. Thus AO4 can be addressed by carefully structuring and developing an argument, with frequent and brief quotation in support, and reaching conclusions based on a relevant response to the question. How high a response is placed in Level 6 depends on the extent to which it meets these descriptors.

For the highest Levels, 7 and 8, there is a very clear critical understanding of the text as a construct and a convincing interpretation of the writer's purpose. The subtext is understood, with appreciation that the deeper implications of a text relate to the culture and context it describes, and the writer's manipulation of the reader's response to it. At this level, there is likely to be much more understanding of characters or voices in the text as constructs, and a critical response to the ways in which a writer guides the reader's response to them. There is also likely to be much more sensitive attention to details of language, such as a poet's similes and sound effects, or a prose writer's use of description and different sentence and paragraph structures. Examiners are open to different interpretations of a text, and welcome personal and evaluative readings which explore alternative responses to the ways in which texts develop and conclude. Stronger responses at this level move beyond individual perceptive moments and sustain a strong argument which is consistently detailed and supported by interpretation of the effects of the writing. Year by year, Examiners are impressed by what the strongest candidates achieve within the time constraints of this exercise, and without further study of the texts. Committed and personal readings are often the most successful, when supported by critical attention to the writer's methods.

Strong responses to this task do not have to be particularly long: they are, however, usually carefully planned and the candidate has left time to consider both how the text concludes and how they want to conclude their personal interpretation of its effect on the reader.

### **Comments on specific questions**

#### **Question 1**

The poem 'Kissing in Vietnamese' by the Vietnamese American poet Ocean Vuong, best known as the author of the novel *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* was a very popular choice. Vuong fled Vietnam as a refugee when a very young child, and his grandfather was a serviceman in the US Navy who was unable to return after the fall of Saigon. His grandmother held the family together and enabled their migration to the USA. The question asked how the poet conveyed what the kisses meant to him, a suggestion that the poem is strongly autobiographical, although the persona is nevertheless a literary construct.

The poem was generally very well understood at a surface level, with appreciation of the relationship of the boy to his grandmother but there was a tendency for candidates to read the images too literally. Some candidates assumed that the poem was set during rather than after a war, although a careful reading of the introductory rubric, the poet's 'as ifs' and dynamic use of tenses was enough to prevent this. Some made connections with the tragedies of contemporary conflicts, and the ways in which they have destroyed and divided families, some were interested in what they perceived as criticisms of 'western' culture and attitudes. The concept of a refugee was perhaps less well understood, alongside the ways in which different cultures collide in this poem. There was some misinterpretation in that some candidates felt that the boy in the poem was writing about his personal experiences of war, and that he had suffered injuries mentioned in the poem so the grandmother was comforting him. Stronger candidates recognised that the persona in the poem was reflecting on the impact that war had on the grandmother. Stronger candidates also recognised the ideas behind the poem particularly with respect to family relationships, bonds of love and the portrayal of strong emotions.

The title was commented upon by many candidates and was an effective 'way in' to the poem due to the cultural significance of 'Vietnamese'. Stronger candidates recognised that this was a reference to language, and contrasted the English language of the poem with language of destruction associated with Vietnamese culture. For example, one candidate wrote that 'flames are making their way back through the intricacies of a young boy's thigh' implies that the grandmother is mentally scarred by the experience of war and results in her not changing the way she kisses, even though the war is over, and so both her language and the poet's are influenced by the memories of the conflict.

Most candidates began by analysing the simile 'as if bombs were bursting in the background', linking this to the passionate nature of the grandmother's kisses, expressed through explosive imagery and plosive sound effects. Many read this as showing that she kisses as if it might be the last time she kisses him. Some wanted to see a link to a specific incident. The juxtaposition of the bombs and 'mint and jasmine' was also frequently commented upon with stronger candidates recognising the sensory (or 'olfactory') significance of smells, as well as sights and sounds in the poem. They then evoked the memory of war alongside a domestic setting both in wartime (the bombs in the garden) and in the present day: the grandmother's own scent and the scent of the boy being consumed by the grandmother. One candidate wrote: 'this highlights a sense of intimacy. A person's scent is a portrayal of who they are as a person as it the first thing one may smell as they walk towards someone. Therefore the grandmother's attempt to relearn his 'scent' is a display of deep affection.' Another commented: 'How he smells day to day is deep within her, so she would never forget him like those lost at war'.

Other images of warfare were correctly identified, but candidates found them harder to connect with the poet's feelings about his grandmother's kisses. Some thought the repeated image of 'a body ... falling apart' referred to a specific incident in the lives of boy or grandmother or was even happening to the poet himself. Weaker responses tended to involve the construction of a narrative speculating about dead parents or a dying grandmother widowed after the grandfather's death. Others more correctly paid attention to the imaginary repeated 'as ifs' as images of the destructiveness of modern warfare, involving minefields and chemical warfare. The most powerful responses made the implied connection between the explosiveness and chemistry of love, even familial love, and these images of traumatic destruction which would have surrounded the grandmother. Some candidates attempted to write about 'your torso/would dance from exit wounds' but struggled to explain its effect, even if they understood what exit wounds are, as they were confused by the word 'dance'. Many wrote about this deliberately disturbing image far too literally. For others, the paradoxical language was an opportunity for deeper analysis of language and implications: 'The peculiar use of 'dance' – a verb – to represent the violent shaking of shrapnel tearing out one's body and then comparing it to kisses using 'as' in line 8 creates vivid gruesome imagery of a hurt boy' powerfully connecting the violence of warfare and the boy's confusion at the grandmother's powerful embrace. Strong responses were alert to the 'flames' as both the heat of love and passion but also a horrifying image of napalm destroying homes and bodies.

The majority of candidates wrote with understanding of the difference between 'western' kisses and 'Vietnamese' kisses although this led to a wide range of generalisations about culture and human behaviour that were not rooted in the text and some highly critical comments about western society. However, those candidates who understood the deeper meaning of the contrast between the kisses wrote impressively about the effect. These concentrated on 'flashy' and 'pursed' as a choice of adjectives which revealed the superficial nature of these kisses 'just for show', in contrast to the depth of feeling shown through the kisses of the grandmother. Almost all candidates understood that these kisses imitated those of the movies, and actually gave little away, their function merely performative. In contrast, the intimacy of the grandmother's kiss is 'as if to breath/you inside her'. Strong responses referenced the enveloping effect of the enjambment here, the physicality of nose, sweat and lungs and the comparison to a personification of death 'clutching your wrist' as evidence of authenticity, defiance and desperation. One candidate wrote that the poet 'personifies death in a simile to say that the length is long enough to kill you from loss of air. Death ready to take you away as a result. These phrases all capture the raw, true passion of the kiss and powerfully contrasts with cliché, forced romantic western kisses.'

Many candidates also wrote about 'your scent is re-learned' and 'sweat pearls into drops of gold inside her lungs'. These images were explored not just for their sensory nature but as evidence of the effect of family detachment and trauma, and proof of how treasured those kisses were. Higher level candidates really developed this image further to link this to the lungs, breathing and therefore life itself – focusing on the binary opposites of life and death in this poem. For example, one candidate commented 'Sweat is not normally glamourised however the poet uses the metaphor to compare it to precious gold. The sweat compared to gold which is hard and impossible to corrode that the grandmother inhaling signifies that the grandson will always remain with her.' While for some the image simply converted something 'disgusting' into something highly valued, others related the sweat to other body parts, and the imagery of fear and war trauma.

Overall, candidates recognised the idea of the strength of familial love in this poem and could link it to the contextual background of having endured/experienced war. Weaker responses saw the suggestion that it was 'as if history/never ended' as simply a reference to eternal love, or to the grandmother's own body 'falling apart'. Stronger responses saw the importance of repetition, the word 'still' and the change of rhythm in these lines, some seeing a more universal reference to war continuing 'somewhere', some to the

continuing trauma experienced by the grandmother, and some to the poet's own involvement in that embrace. The strongest responses explored the paradox of never-ending history and telling a historical story in the present tense 'allows us to image the tragedies that his grandmother's kisses remind him of'. It was interesting to read so many different responses to cultural difference, the impact of history on family relationships, and understanding of trauma alongside sensitive responses to the structure and patterns of the poem.

## Question 2

The prose extract was taken from *A State of Freedom* by Neel Mukherjee, published in 2017. Stronger responses observed that this passage also portrays a modern narrative of cultural difference, refracted through the narrative viewpoint of the anxious father, who makes all the observations here. While the passage initially focuses on the rough and speedy journey and linguistic differences and confusions, it develops into a troubled retrospective view of how little the boy had seemed to understand the Taj Mahal, how different their childhoods had been, and how the boy's US upbringing had been unable to foster his imagination, leaving the father 'to make a mental note to stick to historical facts only'.

Candidates often appeared to choose the prose question as an opportunity for rather straightforward narrative retelling, missing the subtleties of the writing and the deeper implications behind the writer's creation of the narrative voice. Nevertheless, there were some insightful interpretations of the text and most remained focused on the feelings of the father throughout. More successful responses kept the question firmly in mind with many candidates closely focusing on the words used by the writer as a method in a precise, focused and effective manner.

Most candidates commented upon the opening to the text with the description of the driver setting an unsettling scene, the conflicted feelings of the father due to the speed of the car and the father's anxiety about his son's safety and possible car-sickness. These were often seen as masking a deeper insecurity about whether the father's home country was making the impact on the boy that he had hoped for, betrayed by observations about 'dingy roadside eateries' with predictable names, poor spelling and 'unsettling' orthography. Some suggested the father was embarrassed about the impression his homeland might be making on his American son. Stronger responses noted the 'organ-jostling speed' in particular and the way this effectively suggested the unnatural speed of the driver or the way in which the boy can recognise global brands but not read the 'Hindi script'. Fewer commented on the joke, as well as the warning in the sign 'Batter late than never' as a signifier of cultural difference. One strong script noted the effect of the succession of shops and names was both 'quickening the scene and flustering it. The former is further explored when the writer described 'speed-warning signs' uses the term 'record time' and likens the car to a rocket using the word 'launching', but the 'The word 'occupied' denotes the father's flustered emotions. This word succeeds the same flustered scene that lingers outside the car': comparing the scene outside to the turmoil of the father's emotions was an effective bridge to the later parts of the passage.

Here too there were traps for those who did not read carefully enough: just as some thought it was the father and not the driver who 'revelled in the opportunity to drive at speed', not enough paid attention to the father's perspective and use of tense, as well as other evidence from the text, to realise that the boy's questions at the Taj Mahal are part of a flashback. In the father's mind, he is replaying the earlier trip, whereas some candidates appeared to think that they were already at Fatehpur Sikri. However, most realised that the trip was of cultural significance and should have been a bonding opportunity but had opened up a gulf of experiences between father and son. A few commented that he should have realised that 'dragging him from one historical monument to another' was unlikely to be welcomed by a six-year-old. Most candidates felt the father was overthinking and too anxious, but better responses tended to focus on the writer's craft and how he contrasted the busy scene of the first paragraph with the quiet tension inside the car: 'the writer then describes the evolution of the boy's behaviour. 'Ordinarily he would be compulsively spelling out (what was) written in English on shopfronts and billboards'. The word 'ordinarily' implies the sharp contrast between the boy's nature in the USA and his 'subdued' summer in India.' The concentration of the second bullet point on the 'boy's response to the trip' allowed plenty of factual observation about what candidates considered the child's understandable boredom, but more subtle responses realised that this was filtered through the father's worries about a gulf of experience and expectation which had opened up between them.

These different levels of response were equally evident in the retrospective account of the visit to the Taj Mahal. Candidates focused on the son with frequent comments on his 'uncharacteristic placidity' and 'polite forbearance'. The majority of candidates who answered this question recognised the varying emotions of the father as he related to his own experiences and contrasted them with the boy's, acknowledging that the child had grown up in America. Higher level responses noted that the father had grown up surrounded by servants and extended families, and 'with the gift of ghost stories', and observed that this might be reflected in the

repeated references to 'white' in the stories he told the boy. Some understood that the father was concerned that the boy was worried or made anxious by these stories, although the real anxieties are really his own. Very few considered what was meant by 'the imagination residing *under* the visible world', or were able to consider that it is actually the boy who is culturally limited in this context. Many did realise that the father is trying to reconnect with his own past, and disappointed that his son could not join him. There was sometimes a sense that this is unlikely to end well.

Stronger responses observed that the tension of the passage came from the father's unrealistic and unfulfilled expectation of building a stronger bond with his son: 'When this does not work there is a solemnity within the father. A realisation that this child could not experience his Indian childhood because the boy is American. This injects apprehension within the father, that arose from his lack of understanding of an American child ... because he never was one'. The interpretative and evaluative ability to move from sensitive observations about particular details of the narrative towards a more global appreciation of different cultures and their effect on how people think and behave is the mark of a successful candidate's response to an International GCSE Literature paper. Both texts addressed central contemporary issues of migration and displacement in powerful but recognisable familial contexts.