

FRENCH LITERATURE

Paper 8670/41

Texts

Key messages

Teachers should:

- Think carefully about which texts to prepare as some present conceptual problems that are challenging for average and below average candidates.

Teachers should train their students to:

- Check carefully that they manage their time in the examination room well and answer three questions
- Check carefully that they do not answer two questions on the same text
- Think carefully about what the question is asking of them before they start to write
- Refer to the question during the answer, not just at the start and the finish.

Candidates should:

- Label questions with the number, and passage-based questions with **(i)**, **(ii)** and **(iii)**. If questions have not been labelled, it can look as though **(ii)** and **(iii)** were not attempted at all, when all three of **(i)**, **(ii)** and **(iii)** should be answered in the passage-based questions;
- Remember that 'soit...soit' means 'either...or' and should not be copied before question numbers;
- Choose carefully either **(a)** or **(b)** and invest in providing as complete and relevant an answer to that one question as possible;
- Re-read and edit work. Some characters in different texts have similar names, but these should not be confused, e.g. Mariane, Marelle, Madeleine; Élise, Electre.
- Finish with a concluding paragraph;
- Start each new essay on a fresh page.

General comments

In A (commentary) questions, candidates are often asked to explain the situation or context, if the text is a play. This is likely to be most effectively done by giving as precisely as possible the point in the play where the passage occurs. For other parts of the rubric, and for novels, answer the questions, as exactly as you would a reading comprehension question, although with a lot more development, of course, given the longer time and greater number of marks available.

Do not over-rely on the extract in passage-based questions. Neither should they reproduce an extract question that they practised previously. Saying, 'in the extract' about things which are not in the given extract will raise the Examiner's suspicions about pre-learned material.

Answer the question; do not reproduce the blurb from the back of the book. In fact, it is likely to be more useful to memorise events in the text that can be used as examples to illustrate points made, than to memorise quotations.

Candidates should read the question and respond to it. They should not reproduce pre-learned material. If they memorise and write, for example, the blurb on the back of the book, which the Examiner is likely to recognise, they risk being suspected of having copied that from editor's notes which are prohibited in the exam. The blurb is not specific enough to answer the question well, even if it contains a relevant key word, and it should not be memorised or copied.

Please do not leave the Examiners to have to try to work out what was meant in essays or to find ways in which the essay was relevant. It is the candidate's responsibility to answer clearly and earn the marks.

An answer which could have been given for any question and an answer which shows knowledge of the text, but which answers neither **Question (a)** nor **(b)** cannot score highly enough for a pass mark

Make the essay a clear answer to the question, so that even if the question number was accidentally not written at the beginning, it is absolutely clear which question was being answered.

It is not necessary to claim that the theme in the question is the most important topic in the text.

Do not change ink colour or handwriting.

As always, it was good to see that candidates showed enjoyment of the books they had read and were often well prepared to discuss them. Unfortunately, however, there was a higher incidence of answers in English and in memorisation of secondary material this session. The latter never raised marks gained, but it would have been good to see notes made in English conveyed in French, too. This would have resulted in the earning of extra marks in every case.

Comments on specific questions

Section 1

Question 1

Molière: *L'Avare*

(a) (i) It must be said that not all candidates could explain the expression 'without a dowry', and some speculated that it had something to do with daughters obeying their fathers unquestioningly. Some could answer that 'sans dot' meant 'sans argent', but it was unusual to find a response giving more detail about 'les biens qu'une femme apporte en se mariant'. Larousse also defines 'dot' as 'chez de nombreux peuples, prix payé par le futur mari à la famille de la jeune fille'. More important than instruction in the culture of the era was a sound understanding of the play in its own words:

- Harpagon hated spending money (all candidates were clear about this)
- Harpagon was pleased to have arranged for Élise to marry 'sans dot'
- Therefore the relevant definition was, 'les biens qu'une femme apporte en se mariant'

Some said that Harpagon was unable to pay a dowry, but all candidates knew that Harpagon did have some money that he wanted to hide and keep a secret. More pertinent to the significance of the expression, 'sans dot', was to point out that Anselme had agreed to take Élise as his wife 'without *requiring* a dowry'. Only more thoughtful discussions developed this point.

(ii) Candidates found it easy to approve of Valère's conduct in the extract because they knew that his deception was merely a method of flattering Harpagon and that Valère would marry Élise himself in the end. More discerning candidates mentioned that Valère began to agree with Harpagon, before the extract, to flatter him as usual, *before he even knew* what the master of the house was talking to his daughter about. Although by flattery Valère was likely to be able to ingratiate himself with Harpagon, and had as his objective to win Harpagon's favour so that he could marry Élise, Valère was agreeing to oblige Élise to marry someone else here, and had seemed stumped at the news of 'sans dot' a few moments before. The most thoughtful responses pointed out that Élise had not approved of Valère's strategy as their exchanges immediately before the extract, while Harpagon was checking on his money in the garden, showed. A few candidates recalled Valère's suggestion that Élise should feign an illness to delay the wedding to Anselme planned for that evening as additional evidence to approve of Valère's conduct here.

Others gave just as convincing arguments to disapprove of Valère's behaviour, because they felt that he should not have deceived Harpagon.

(iii) Answers emphasised Harpagon's avarice as well as his authoritarian style and willingness to welcome flattery reflected in his words in this passage and throughout the scene. 'Reentrant' in line 1 also recalled Harpagon's nervousness for his money, buried in the garden, which he had just returned from checking after hearing a dog barking and fearing the worst.

- (b) Many candidates could readily illustrate their responses to this question from the play, recounting how Harpagon was mean and preoccupied with his money at the beginning, and it was still the same at the end. However, more thoughtful answers used Harpagon's initial objectionable marriage plans for his family to show how he did end up finding a satisfactory arrangement for himself as he allowed his children to marry according to their choice after all.

Question 2

Guy de Maupassant: *Bel-Ami*

- (a) (i) There were a plurality of answers to this first part of the question, not least because these were the second seats Duroy and Forestier had taken since arriving at the Folies-Bergère, and they had walked around the gallery, too. Since their chance encounter on the streets of Paris that evening, they had also been to the offices of *La Vie Française* and a cafe, before coming to this cabaret music hall, where by now they were in the garden.

Many candidates could explain that the reason Duroy was intimidated had something to do with the presence of the two women, but only the most detailed answers mentioned that 'la grosse brune' had just told Forestier, 'C'est ton ami qui me séduit. C'est vraiment un joli garçon. Je crois qu'il me ferait faire des folies!'

- (ii) The pieces of advice given by Forestier, 'Il faut soigner [le succès auprès des femmes]. Ça peut te mener loin', and, 'C'est encore par elles qu'on arrive le plus vite', were thought to have been useful if it was in following them that Duroy secured his social climbing so swiftly. Forestier's words certainly proved true in Duroy's life.
- (iii) Some candidates developed the response to (ii) here, pointing out that it was at the meal the following evening at the Forestier's home that Duroy met Mmes Forestier, de Marelle and Walter for the first time, women through whom he could succeed at work, and become rich. Others used the presence of the three journalists at the dinner to focus on how it gave Duroy an opening for his first job at the newspaper.
- (b) Despite the usual claims that the theme in the question was a major topic in the text, death was not dominant in this novel. Nevertheless, most candidates were able to refer to Charles Forestier, whose death was the most immediate to the reader, not only because his decline into ill health at a relatively young age was related on different occasions and given that Duroy went to support Madeleine as he was dying, but since Duroy very quickly asked his friend's widow to become his wife, to which she agreed after some hesitation. This enabled Duroy to thrive at work and increase his wealth. Conversely, he did not appreciate his colleagues' teasing him that he had simply filled Forestier's shoes at home and at work. Duroy did not care to 'inherit' the marital unfaithfulness of Forestier's widow, either.

One of the ways in which marrying Madeleine allowed Duroy to increase in wealth related to the death of le comte de Vaudrec. The count bequeathed a large sum of money to Madeleine, but, in discussion with a lawyer, it was established that it would have been 'inappropriate' for only Madeleine to inherit. To avoid the situation not reflecting well on Georges and Madeleine's marriage, Duroy independently inherited half of the legacy.

Although the deaths of Madeleine's parents pre-dated these events, they came up in this context. Le comte de Vaudrec was Madeleine's sugar daddy partly because she was a vulnerable orphan.

Question 3

Jean-Paul Sartre: *Les Mouches*

- (a) (i) Candidates could recount that Égisthe and Clytemnestre had been responsible for the murder of Agamemnon fifteen years earlier. They did not always discuss the *significance of that for Oreste*, not only losing his father and family, but going into exile.
- (ii) The most successful responses dealt with the words, 'à présent' and discussed the significant timing of events in the play, the anniversary of Agamemnon's murder and the 'fête des Morts'.
- (iii) Some candidates were keen to expose 'painful secrets' of all the characters, but the more thoughtful ones looked at the words in their context in lines 17–18 of the passage. Here it was *the gods* who had the secrets. From that point, some were able to quote Jupiter's words in Act II, Tableau II, Scene v, 'Le secret douloureux des Dieux et des rois: c'est que les hommes sont libres...et ils ne le savent pas.' and therein was the key to Jupiter and Égisthe's power.
- (b) Only half as many candidates answered part (b), but most made a good attempt to assess the extent to which the play was both philosophical and dramatic. Occasionally a far greater emphasis was placed on philosophy, even to the exclusion of any mention of drama, but answers tended to be well illustrated from the text.

Question 4

Marguerite Duras: *Moderato Cantabile*

- (a) It would have been nice to see some more structured answers in response to (i), perhaps with a whole paragraph devoted to 'la patronne' and a separate one about 'son établissement'. As it was, the two tended to be rolled into one. Most candidates mentioned that a woman had been murdered in the cafe at the beginning of the novel and that Anne and Chauvin began to meet there regularly, often joined by the factory workers in the early evening as the sun was setting. Very few wrote about the (female) boss who was often knitting.
- (ii) This tended to be less well answered. Some even discussed the things that Anne said without focusing on her lies in the extract, although there were some good suggestions as to her reasons for 'playing the innocent'. All could name Chauvin in (iii) and say a little about him. Some overlooked to answer the second part of the question, about why he was there, but on the whole, candidates could recall a good deal about him, his previous working life and his routine throughout the novel, gravitating, like Anne, towards that place and seeking her company.
- (b) Probably about half of all candidates began their essays with a decisive statement that the relations between Anne and Chauvin had a negative effect on her. They generally proceeded to illustrate this view, though not always with much development.

The remainder entertained the idea that there were some positive outworkings for Anne: the escape from a monotonous existence that her meetings with Chauvin allowed her, along with a new found freedom. The most thoughtful responses examined in more detail ways in which there were positive effects, such as feelings of happiness in her personal life, but also negative consequences for her family.

Section 2

Question 5

André Gide: *Les Caves du Vatican*

- (a) There were too few answers to make comment appropriate.
- (b) There were too few answers to make comment appropriate.

Question 6

Albert Camus: *Les Justes*

It was good to find that candidates had enjoyed reading this play and been prompted to reflect on terrorism as a result.

- (a) Candidates were asked to comment on Stepan's goals, on his objectives in relation to the quotation in the question. It was therefore not necessary to include many other characters in the answer, although some successful comparisons were made with Kaliayev.

There were mixed responses to this question as not all candidates seemed to focus on the key words, 'Commentez les buts...'. Some discussed the character of Stepan too generally, while others seized upon his views on justice while neglecting to answer the question in its entirety.

- (b) Some candidates focused on Kaliayev's words in the question, while others discussed the importance of his personal sacrifice to the exclusion of the quotation. He said, 'J'ai choisi d'être innocent' in Act 2, having chosen not to throw the bomb and kill the 'innocent' children in the carriage along with the Grand Duke.

After reflecting, discussing with the others, facing criticism and reconsidering his position, it is important to Kaliayev to be trusted again and to go and carry out the assassination. Thereafter he is arrested, made to look guilty of betraying his comrades and put to death, making the ultimate sacrifice, but glad to have followed his convictions.

Question 7

Simone de Beauvoir: *Les Belles Images*

- (a) Candidates mentioned that the conclusion of the novel was 'satisfying' in as much as the situation with regard to Catherine, and Brigitte, was satisfactorily resolved, and the psychologist had been helpful. Laurence had stopped seeing Lucien, and her parents had been reconciled, while there was reason to be optimistic about her return to health.

It was sometimes overlooked that the question began, 'Dans quelle mesure...', however it was rare to read an essay which described anything but an optimistic conclusion to the novel.

- (b) Only one in ten candidates answering on this text opted for this question. Most could identify Laurence as the 'speaker', although she was thinking it to herself at this point in Chapter 2, when she was preparing the house and family for dinner. Her daughter Catherine's friend, Brigitte, struck her as neglected as she was in no hurry to go home to an empty house. Laurence reflected that it would have been kind to invite Brigitte to eat with them but, she thought, 'Jean-Charles déteste l'imprévu', and she had no desire for Jean-Charles even to meet Brigitte anyway.

Question 8

Romain Gary: *La Vie devant soi*

- (a) For the most part, this question was approached well, despite occasional oversight of the word 'trou', leading to essays entirely devoted to Jewishness in the novel in general. Although candidates might more helpfully have begun with a brief description of the 'trou juif', that extra room downstairs from Madame Rosa's sixth floor flat, which she went to sometimes at night and to which she was once followed by Momo, from whom we get the description of the chandelier and Jewish candles. Momo enabled Madame Rosa to die in peace in her 'trou juif'.
- (b) This was a straightforward question about an unusual character. Although s/he does not play a dominant role in the novel, it was pleasing not only to see the readiness with which candidates could discuss the character, but also their confident frankness about the confusion that could be caused by this transvestite prostitute.

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General comments

As always, it was good to see that candidates showed enjoyment of the books they had read and were often well prepared to discuss them. Unfortunately, however, there was a higher incidence of answers in English and in memorisation of secondary material this session. The latter never raised marks gained, but it would have been good to see notes made in English conveyed in French, too. This would have resulted in the earning of extra marks in every case.

Comments on specific questions

Section 1

Question 1

Molière: *L'Avare*

- (a) (i)** For most candidates this question proved straightforward – but success depended greatly on the individual's ability to judge the correct amount of narrative detail needed to provide the context.
- (ii)** Most answers showed understanding of the irony here and candidates were able to justify their opinions with evidence of Harpagon's previous and consistently uncharitable attitude.
- (iii)** Although the question asked for comment on the scene, quite a large number of answers were based entirely on the extract and were therefore limited.

(b) There was a tendency to refer to comedy in general in this question, rather than focusing on the question. Some covered anger and comedy separately, while others had difficulty explaining that we laugh at Harpagon's anger when

- it is exaggerated/out of proportion
- he is being unreasonable

Candidates are reminded that they will not always agree with statements made in questions. Some approached this question in such a way as to write, 'Yes, we laugh at Harpagon's anger but even more we laugh at...' This approach proved less successful than, 'We laugh at Harpagon's anger not because of the anger, but because of the 'nonsense'. We might laugh at the slapstick but we do not always laugh at the anger.

Question 2

Guy de Maupassant: *Bel-Ami*

(a) (i) There was some confusion among candidates about whether Suzanne's parents had already read Du Roy's letter by this point (but it was the night on which Suzanne went missing, so they had not yet received it). If candidates did not understand M. Walter's desire to avoid a scandal, responses to (i) were considerably weakened, and he was said to declare, 'Il le faut', in an attempt to persuade his wife, or because he thought Du Roy was a man of such great potential. Some candidates even thought that he would be impressed by Du Roy's wealth, clearly having forgotten, or not fully appreciated, M. Walter's own far more considerable fortune.

Sometimes candidates thought that if M. Walter did not agree to the marriage, then the couple would marry anyway, against his will. This foreshortened the impact of Du Roy's manipulation, even though doubt was often cast over the genuine nature of his feelings for Suzanne. The success of his plan to attract a handsome dowry upon his marriage and to live in expectation of a significant inheritance depended on the family agreeing to a swift wedding to cover up the nights that the couple spent away together alone.

Some candidates wandered into detail of his 'réflexions positives' on Georges – thus leaving little material for (ii) – and emphasising the need to thoroughly consider all three questions before embarking on the response.

(ii) Some candidates found it difficult to stop themselves from evaluating Du Roy negatively, but most were able to use the passage to comment on the positive reflections given by M. Walter. The question was fairly well answered overall – although some candidates rather overdid M. Walter's 'total admiration and respect' for Du Roy.

(iii) A key word here was 'jealousy'. More important than providing comment on lines 15–17 of the passage was some acknowledgement that Mme Walter was really very self-absorbed at this point, so candidates tended not to convince with their suggestions that she had been hurt by Du Roy in the past and did not want her daughter to suffer the same fate. Not only was she losing him, and that to her own daughter, she could not even confide in her husband about it all. In general, this was successfully explained – but personal opinion was often lacking in answers.

(b) Occasionally candidates could remember that Madeleine Forestier had negotiated some degree of 'freedom' before agreeing to marry Du Roy, and it would have been interesting to read more developed discussions of the impression that this might give of Maupassant's attitude towards marriage.

There was a tendency to confuse the writer and his protagonist, sometimes intensified by the inclusion of almost completely irrelevant autobiographical details.

Question 3

Jean-Paul Sartre: *Les Mouches*

- (a) (i) Very few candidates made the vital connection with the previous scene and, as a result, most offered the 'change' as being Oreste's own awakening to the realisation of his own 'liberté' and his subsequent resolve to rescue the Argiens from their prison of remorse.
- (ii) Responses showed fair understanding overall, but also a general lack of personal opinion about Électre's reactions.
- (iii) This part of the answers was fair generally, although here (or in (i)) some answers ventured unwisely into attempts to explain existentialism without fully answering what should have been a fairly straightforward question.
- (b) This question was understood by the majority of candidates, most of whom were able to explain the quotation and place it in its context. What was, in the main, lacking in answers seen was Égisthe's own fear of the likely reaction of the Argiens should they realise that they were free – the threat not only to his personal safety but also to law and order.

Question 4

Marguerite Duras: *Moderato Cantabile*

- (a) (i) A few answers managed to echo the emphasis of the extract on Anne's fear – not only from her words, but also from her actions and gestures. Much depended on the candidate's ability to read between the lines. One or two answers went, perhaps, a little too far in suggesting that she was afraid that Chauvin threatened to physically harm her (and quoting his comment 'Je voudrais que vous soyez morte').
- (ii) There were some encouraging answers which began with a resounding, 'No!' Candidates who had a good knowledge of the text had little difficulty in deciding that Chauvin's behaviour in this final chapter was not typical, and were able to provide at least some of the contrasting elements. Candidates who chose 'typical' were very soon in difficulty if/when they attempted to justify the choice, since the dynamics of this scene were reversed and very different from the routine of their previous meetings.
- (iii) Many candidates found little to say here, except to provide something of a commentary of the extract, which was often acceptable, provided that knowledge of the text beyond the extract was also shown in the response. Occasionally a candidate continued from part (ii) along the lines that the attitude of the factory workers in the passage was no more typical of them than Chauvin's behaviour was of him.
- (b) There were some thoughtful reflections focusing on the boy and his relationship with his mother, although of course candidates had access to more material from the mother's point of view. The best answers recognised a very close interdependent relationship; average answers were based only on the piano lessons and weakest answers of all saw little love between mother and child, and were too quick to write off Anne as a drunken and morally outrageous woman with no control over her wilful and disobedient son.

Section 2

Question 5

André Gide: *Les Caves du Vatican*

- (a) Most answers reflected candidates' difficulty in referring to 'vanité' of any kind – although a few made passing mention of Protos. Few saw the work as farce or 'sotie'.
- (b) Candidates found it challenging to place the quotation in context and consequently none saw the connection with Julius's book or Lafcadio's motiveless crime. Instead, they offered disjointed bits of narrative, mainly about Anthime's conversion or Protos's masterminding of the Millipède plot.

Question 6

Albert Camus: *Les Justes*

It was good to find that candidates had enjoyed reading this play and had been prompted to reflect on terrorism as a result.

- (a) There were a few intelligent and well balanced answers. The contrast of the two characters was well grasped overall and most candidates provided a direct answer to the question. Since the plot and characters were understood by most, it was the amount of detail and justification which separated the stronger responses from the weaker ones.
- (b) This was the more popular of the two questions. Most candidates recognised love of the country and its people, love and support between the members of the group, love of justice and the love between Kaliayev and Dora. More thorough answers also introduced Kaliayev's love of life and, the love of the Duchess for her dead husband.

Question 7

Simone de Beauvoir: *Les Belles Images*

- (a) For the small number of Centres who selected this text, this proved to be the more popular question. Candidates were divided almost equally, but not necessarily in the way anticipated: some were of the opinion that the marriage was doomed to end in divorce and the others failed to predict an outcome at all – but most agreed that the marriage needed working at and that the fault lay mainly with Jean-Charles who seemed too eager to pass on the problem to a professional stranger in the hope of finding a solution. Some candidates depicted the marriage very negatively, possibly more than was warranted by the novel and referred to the advice almost as a final straw. Some used the advice as a proof that the marriage was failing.
- (b) Candidates needed to have a clear view of what was modern in the novel to answer this question successfully. It had been expected that some essays might be 'one-sided' as far as 'positive or negative?' in the question was concerned, but it was surprising, nevertheless, that quite such a negative view of the era was portrayed. Candidates often gave interesting appraisals of characters' responses to, e.g. new sound systems. Some discussed negative impressions of family relationships, but were less convincing about the connection between these and 'tout ce qui était moderne'.

Answers did not often raise the problem of world hunger and disease which contrasted so vividly with the opening scene and which gave the sensitive Catherine so much difficulty to understand why the world of 'the most modern in everything' could not, or would not, solve the problems of the world of the 'have-nots'.

Question 8

Romain Gary: *La Vie devant soi*

- (a) Answers frequently put too much emphasis on Mme Rosa. It was good, therefore, to find the occasional response which showed knowledge of M. Hamil as well as some sensitivity to his increasing difficulties. The question of euthanasia was not widely mentioned, although quite a few answers sympathised with Mme Rosa's dread of ending up as a 'vegetable' on some hospital ward and approved of Momo's attempts to ensure that she would not. A few candidates provided the contrasting attitude to the elderly in Africa. The difficulty presented by the stairs up to the sixth floor was common to all answers, although it was rare for candidates to attempt to develop it further in order to illustrate the increasing problem of mobility of Mme Rosa – and of Dr. Katz when visiting her – eventually needing to be carried up and down, until she was finally confined to her 'trou juif'. Indeed there was little mention overall to dependence on others to be able to survive – or to the compassion and willing assistance provided by neighbours and friends, although most responses credited Momo with thoughtfulness and maturity beyond his years for the way in which he devotedly tended to Mme Rosa's every need. Most answers achieved a mark in the 12–15 range.

- (b) Again, in this question, the focus was almost entirely on Mme Rosa, with only occasional references to Moïse. More surprising, perhaps, was the absence of the message of tolerance between the various ethnic groups resident in Belleville, with no reference at all to Momo's own words on the subject. The words 'diverses attitudes' were underestimated by most candidates. The living conditions were the same for all, but this was not always acknowledged. The living conditions were hardly better when Madame Rosa was younger, although she was better able to cope with them then.