

FRENCH

Paper 8670/42

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.

For passage-based questions

Read the passage carefully and use a highlighter to help focus on key words.

Briefly put the passage in context. Answer questions separately, not in a block essay form. Read the questions carefully and avoid repetition. Show knowledge of the text but only if it relates to the question. Go to the heart of the question in the introductory paragraph and avoid irrelevant generalities and storytelling

For essay questions

Teach candidates to read the question carefully and to plan. If a question has two aspects to discuss, make sure both are covered. Focus and read the essay title again and again so as not to lose sight of its point. Remind candidates of the instructions on the front of the question paper, 'You should write between 500 and 600 words for each answer'. There is no point at all in regurgitating a prepared essay, however sophisticated and detailed, as it will very rarely match the question and will not get more than a few marks..

Teachers should stress the need to refer to the question throughout the answer, not just at the start and the finish.

Teachers should train their candidates to check carefully that:

- They are answering a question on a text they have studied;
- They are answering **one question from each section** and one other; i.e. three questions altogether and no more;
- They are not answering two questions on the same text;
- They study the wording of the question carefully, so as not to answer a slightly different question, perhaps reusing material from an essay done before;
- They are aware that some questions have two parts. (Look out for the 'et' in the question.)

Candidates should:

- Follow the instructions on the front of the question paper, including writing in dark blue or black pen. Some candidates copy the question with one colour and answer it with another. This is not necessary, but is not a problem. However editing work with pencil or a different colour of ink, or changing the handwriting, could give rise to suspicions of malpractice and should be avoided;
- Practise with past questions and think carefully about what the question is asking before starting to write;
- Note key words in the question and mention these in the introductory paragraph.
- Resist the temptation to tell the story – answer the question relevantly;
- Note that the highest scoring answers will be relevant, well-illustrated and developed, attempting to analyse and make comparisons;
- It is vital to label questions with the number, and passage-based questions with **(i)**, **(ii)** and **(iii)**. Candidates sometimes demonstrate a good knowledge of the text and background in **(i)** but become muddled in **(ii)** and **(iii)**, so do not fulfil the promise of the beginning of the response. If the confusion is severe and the questions have not been labelled, it can look as though **(ii)** and **(iii)** were not attempted at all, making a particularly poor impression;
- Remember that 'soit ... soit' means 'either ... or' and should not be copied before question numbers;
- Finish with a concluding paragraph;
- Start each new essay on a fresh page.

General Comments

Candidates are reminded to be careful to answer the question about the text of that question. **Question 1 (b)** invited description and comment on relations between the mother and her children in Duras' *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique*. An answer was seen this session that described and commented on relations between the mother and her children in a different text.

It is good to refer to the extracts as appropriate, but independent knowledge of the text should be shown, too. Please see the section on specific questions, for example **Questions 2 (b)** and **4 (a)** for more on this. If candidates limit the content of their essays to the information in the passage in their answers, then they will give the impression that they have not read the whole text.

Candidates need to find a 'happy balance' between 'assuming that the Examiner knows nothing' and 'remembering that the Examiner has also read the text'. Although narration irrelevant to the question is not required, candidates should begin to answer the question at the beginning, but should not hold back from showing knowledge of the texts. This was successfully done this session by, for example, referring to characters initially by their surnames and thereafter varying the words, including the use of short, apt descriptions or quotations. In **Question 4 (a)**, it was pleasing to see ways in which candidates showed their thorough knowledge of the text by recalling that Seurel, François, had cycled to La Ferté-d'Angillon on this occasion, or that Yvonne's horse mentioned in line 14 was named, 'Bélisaire'. In a minimal number of words, excellent and detailed knowledge of the text was shown.

It was evident that Centres had used past questions when training their candidates, and detailed knowledge was shown in those areas. Candidates should select the question they choose to answer carefully, though, and ensure that their material is relevant. Sometimes the material was tailored efficiently and relevantly to this session's questions, such as the significance of the final scene in Paris when Bernard did not display a shred of understanding and showed flagrant lack of interest in what Thérèse wanted to say, in answer to **Question 5 (a)**.

Some candidates this session did not identify which question they were answering and it was not clear until halfway through, if at all. For **Question 8**, some candidates said as much, or as little, about differences between the brothers (**Question (a)**) as about the novel as a 'succès extraordinaire' (**Question (b)**). Candidates are advised to choose carefully either **(a)** or **(b)** and to invest in providing as complete and relevant an answer to that one question as possible.

It seemed that some candidates had studied more than three texts. While this is laudable, it seemed to push some candidates to confuse some texts e.g. *La guerre de Troie n'aura pas lieu* and *Antigone*; *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* and other Molière plays.

Comments on specific questions

Section 1

Question 1

Duras: *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique*

- (a) The passage was taken from the end of chapter 16 of the *2e Partie* and was a retrospective comment. The beginning of that chapter makes clear that Suzanne was thinking about Joseph and an event of two years before. Candidates did not always seem to recall that the events in the extract had taken place earlier.

Most made references in (i) to Joseph's loyalty to his family. It was generally understood that Joseph had not wanted to kill the agent but clearly enjoyed exercising his power to frighten him off the property. Overall, candidates could paraphrase the extract, but did not add much to explain the young man's behaviour.

Most of the mother's recent contact had been by letter, in a long-winded style, threatening violence, so the extract reflected relations between the mother and the agents in its threat of violence. The agent had kept the mother waiting outside his office in Kam dozens of times (where she was at his mercy), but on 'her/their' territory, all three of them were free to ridicule him. The whole experience was more new to Suzanne, and Joseph had not been involved before. Few candidates were able to make reference in (ii) to the problems relating to the lease of the property by the 'agents cadastraux' and the scam they operated. In general, answers contained little detail of the mother's visits to the cadastre's office or of her letters.

Question (iii) posed few problems, but 'la B. 12' seemed to be an unknown quantity to some candidates. The presence of a number of the male characters in the novel was identified by their cars (la Léon Bollée/M. Jo; 'une petite auto neuve, luisante'/the agent, at the beginning of this chapter), and for Joseph, it was the B. 12. He was planning to leave, but his car was to serve as a reminder of him. After Joseph moved away and stopped using it, the car fell into disuse and began to rust.

- (b) This seemed to be a straightforward question, for which candidates found sufficient textual evidence to make a case. Most of them correctly identified the main points. Candidates drew attention to the mother's favouritism shown to Joseph, and references were made to her violence towards Suzanne and her mercenary ways. The children's love and support was underlined, especially Suzanne's behaviour before her death and Joseph's distress when it had happened. The mother's love, by contrast, was not easily described. There was an emphasis on her being a 'monstre au charme puissant', as in the June 2013 paper, but this was not always made relevant to the relationship between her and her children as asked in this question. Conscientious candidates were able to show their knowledge and the best could shine, attempting to compare individual differences: the mother did not treat her two children in the same way, nor were their relationships with her identical.

Question 2

Anouilh: *Antigone*

- (a) When the guards brought Antigone to Créon having caught her burying Polynice (a second and final time), the king instructed them not to tell anyone, so that he could spare her life without being seen to act unjustly. She refused this action, though, even threatening to go back and bury him more. Créon recounted 'cette pauvre histoire' about the wayward brothers almost half way through the play in an appeal to Antigone to understand his position and change her mind. Examiners saw this situation described in various amounts of detail in (i).

The extract helped to understand Créon's dilemma, caught between his duty as king and his love for his niece who would also have become his daughter-in-law. His family situation was covered more fully in (ii) than the political constraints within which he was acting. Créon wanted to persuade Antigone to be pragmatic like him, 'dire oui', pursue happiness for herself and others. Some very good responses showed considerable insight when discussing the two characters and their contrasting positions of pragmatism versus idealism.

If candidates relied too heavily on the passage, or lacked knowledge of the rest of the play, then they tended to emphasise signs of defeatism in (iii). At the other extreme, some seemed to think that all there was to Antigone was her stubbornness. The best answers gave a more subtle portrait of her and her dilemma, emphasising the contrasts between how she almost seemed about to proceed and what Créon was expecting at the end of the passage, and how she finally reacted. Some did not see the future tense, 'va réagir', in the question, but most of the better answers were able to show the discrepancy between her acceptance of Créon's advice until he mentioned the word 'bonheur' and her later resolve to seek death rather than a compromised, tainted and incomplete happiness with Hémon.

- (b) The best essays were convincing and intelligent, but many candidates missed the point altogether, discussing occurrences of 'oui' and 'non' without recognising the significance of 'dire oui' and 'dire non', which are mentioned half a dozen times each in the central section of Antigone's time alone with Créon in the third quarter of the play. Discussion of other characters was therefore not usually relevant. In particular, candidates could not be deemed to have knowledge of the text if they confined themselves to the 'oui' and 'non' in the extract in **Question (a)**. Stronger candidates immediately recognised that the question had particular reference to Créon and Antigone and defined 'dire non' as representing Antigone's conviction that personal liberty must be upheld whatever the cost, where 'dire oui' was submitting to duty, and mentioned the difference between Créon's acceptance of compromise and Antigone's refusal to do so. Some answers became very complicated, especially from candidates who saw Antigone as saying 'oui' to death, instead of 'non' to life on Créon's terms. The second part of the question, about which attitude was the most valid in this context was sometimes overlooked.

Question 3

Molière: *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*

- (a) This was a popular text, yet there seemed to be confusion between the terms of the oxymoronic title, 'Bourgeois' and 'Gentilhomme', perhaps because of the modern meaning of 'bourgeois'. Some candidates thought that Jourdain wanted to be bourgeois or wanted to be a 'bourgeois gentilhomme,' or equated the nobility solely with wealth (ironically in the case of Dorante) and education.

More promising candidates were able to state in (i) that the 'Maître de Philosophie' was there, like the other Maîtres, to teach M. Jourdain, at his request, in order to further his quest to become a 'gentilhomme', that he proved neither philosophical nor wise when he came to blows with the other Maîtres and that he was happy to digress into the teaching of the alphabet, spelling or reading the almanac.

More thoroughly prepared candidates accurately described Jourdain's infatuation with the 'Marquise' in (ii) as another way to accede to the status of 'Gentilhomme', since she belonged to the nobility. Some mentioned Dorante's duplicitous intervention and developed the response with details of other ways in which Jourdain tried to impress the lady (the bow, the diamond, the banquet).

Three key words in **Question (iii)** were 'dit', 'Jourdain' and 'ici'. Candidates frequently missed the question's insistence on the comedy of M. Jourdain's words in this extract, but even when it was duly noted, candidates found it very difficult to explain the comedy in clear and simple terms. In this extract Molière subtly teases the Précieux movement: M. Jourdain wants his straightforward, clear message to be rearranged 'à la mode'; the Maître rearranges the words, using the précieux' methods of distorting language; the Maître shuffles words around as they might have done, knowing it was nonsense as demonstrated by his response to the question: 'quelle est la meilleure?' By making him admit that M. Jourdain's sentence was the best, Molière shows that clarity and simplicity are preferable to pretentious fashion as all classical writers demonstrated. This double-bluff would have amused an initiated audience, but the point was too difficult for candidates to perceive. Responses indicated that they were baffled by the question and tried to show comedy in M. Jourdain's gullible attitude and irony in his joyful pronouncements of his innate ability, having spoken in 'prose' for forty years, for which credit was given.

- (b) Focused responses described Molière's stated aim to entertain and make us laugh, 'corriger les vices de l'homme par le rire', mentioning the fact that he was writing for the Court, that Louis XIV

wanted him to mock the Turks, that Dorante epitomised the impoverished aristocracy who were not immune to taking advantage of others, and that Jourdain was a gullible would-be social climber – Molière’s intention in its simplest form. A few pointed out social satire but also a criticism of human nature, which led to discussing, very relevantly, Molière’s universality. Some mentioned the Turkish masquerade, the music and the necessity to amuse the king.

Question 4

Alain-Fournier: *Le Grand Meaulnes*

- (a) Occasionally candidates did not have a clear grasp of the order of events in the story, which occasionally spoiled otherwise sensitive and perceptive answers. They occasionally mistook the episode as coming in the epilogue, when Seurel met Meaulnes after Yvonne’s death. As noted in the question paper, the passage was taken from ‘3e Partie, Ch. 4’.

Seurel had just told Meaulnes that, ‘tout espoir n’est pas perdu’ because, since they had previously been in contact, Seurel had discovered the location of the ‘domaine’. Candidates could extract from the passage that Seurel had found Yvonne, so it was more pertinent also to explain in (i) that she was not married, contrary to what Meaulnes had heard from Valentine (and communicated to Seurel by letter in 2e Partie, Ch. 12), who had herself been misled by Mme Moineau (3e Partie, Ch. 3). Unfortunately, many answers were vague, regurgitated the extract and did not show detailed knowledge of the whole text.

Meaulnes’ reaction may have been superficially surprising as he had been looking and waiting for the ‘domaine’ and Yvonne, but **Question (ii)** posed a problem for those who did not remember that Meaulnes, when he believed that Yvonne had married, had ended his search for her, renounced his ideals and started a relationship with Valentine in Paris, and felt that he had betrayed Yvonne, making things complex for him at this point. More discerning candidates stated that, although at this point in the novel the reader did not know the whole story, when Seurel subsequently discovered Meaulnes’ diaries, it became clear that he had felt he had betrayed both Frantz and Yvonne. In some superficial responses, candidates thought that Meaulnes was just in shock, possibly embarrassed, or that he no longer loved Yvonne. Flashbacks and diaries discovered subsequently had the key to an accurate response.

Question (iii) proved more difficult as few were able to surmise Seurel’s feelings and keep their analysis to this extract specifically. If the candidate had no knowledge of Meaulnes’ letter to Seurel (about ending his search for Yvonne) and diaries, or the detail of the Valentine episode, then the answer to (iii), like that to (ii), had little hope of success. Essays of lesser quality expressed sentiments such as, ‘Surely, as Meaulnes’ best friend, Seurel understood exactly how his friend felt at this point’.

- (b) This question sometimes felt like a second choice, as though it had been chosen by candidates who could not place the extract in its context. A small number of candidates found it difficult to differentiate between regret and nostalgia and treated ‘nostalgie-et-regret’ as a ‘sealed unit’, thus losing precision. Most candidates devoted more time to regret than nostalgia. A fair number did not seem to have a clear idea about what they understood by nostalgia. Some simply made no mention of it in their answers. A few mentioned the weather and landscape as an adjunct to the nostalgic feel of the novel. Others, however, could identify François as a nostalgic character, looking back on his School days and his family. Some candidates evoked Meaulnes’s nostalgia for the ‘domaine perdu’. On the whole, ‘regret’ was developed more successfully, with the better answers mentioning regrets from Meaulnes, Yvonne, François and Frantz. It was pleasing to read the work of candidates who attempted to broaden the remit of the question by adding other aspects of the ambiance which they considered to be of equal, or greater, importance. In one or two cases, the counterpoint was done with subtlety, including illustration of ‘nostalgie et regret’, together with loyalty, friendship, love, separation, etc. Such essays were very good and showed sensitive and insightful appreciation of the book.

Section 2

Question 5

Mauriac: *Thérèse Desqueyroux*

- (a) The quotation in this question came from chapter 8. Many candidates were able to describe Thérèse and Bernard's relationship, but struggled to relate it to the remark. Some very sensitive and detailed answers showed clear understanding of the emphasis and requirements of the question, listing the 'mots essentiels' about which the Desqueyroux couple held different views and values, such as marriage, freedom, life, love, the role of women, etc., taking up the main points of discord between them to produce solid pieces of work. They also noted the few real conversations they had. The weakest answers merely repeated the quote in the question as a kind of leitmotif which came as a codicil to various undeveloped statements. The most competent answers focused exclusively on Thérèse and Bernard, thus avoiding irrelevant digressions about other characters. On the whole, however, the majority of responses failed to 'come to grips' with the question, even though the understanding and knowledge of the text were generally good.
- (b) This was the more popular choice of questions on this text and usually the better understood and more successfully answered, although a fair proportion limited their responses to character studies instead of giving an analysis of Anne and Jean's *roles* in the novel. The best answers explained the importance of Anne's *role* in making Thérèse aware that love does exist, and in her becoming jealous when she realised that her relationship with Bernard was only a pale reflection of that of Anne with Jean. They also saw Jean's *role* as a catalyst for Thérèse's attempt at poisoning Bernard and at reaching for freedom in Paris. Many candidates did not focus closely enough on 'role' – why the author invented these characters, how they influenced the main characters, etc. candidates generally related very well and sympathetically to the novel, and the more able also attempted to analyse and compare characters.

Question 6

Giraudoux: *La guerre de Troie n'aura pas lieu*

- (a) It was expected that candidates would be able to explain the denial versus inevitability of war theme that runs right from the beginning to the very end of the play, and this question was generally quite well answered, with many candidates able to write something about the opposing sides of optimism and pessimism. The question asked for explanation and comment, but not all essays were fully developed. The spectator/reader/candidate knows both something of the history of the Trojan war, as well as the conclusion of this play, but is likely to be 'carried along' with the optimism/pessimism, denial/attempted avoidance/inevitability of the war. More able candidates discussed whether this was quite the same as 'accepte de balancer'.
- (b) Evasive and contradictory in Act I, scene viii, and something of a pawn in the proceedings, Hélène does not come across as a happy character. There were some good essays on her which were perceptive and intelligent, demonstrating her alienation and its possible consequences on her state of mind. The first part of the question was not to be ignored: 'Étrangère aux autres et à elle-même'. She was a foreigner to others in Troie by nationality, but not only on that level. Many did not really explain the 'étrangère' element, resorting to a straight character analysis of Helen or just to storytelling. The best candidates mentioned how Hélène did not know her own mind as to whether she was really in love with Pâris or wanted to remain in Troie.

Question 7

Bazin: *Au nom du fils*

- (a) Centres may have been deterred from studying this text by the fact that it was out of print at the time, however second-hand copies were readily available online. It would have been interesting to read more of what candidates might think the reader sees that M. Astin does not see, but taking, for example, the fact that he does not know for sure that Bruno is not his child until chapter 22, perhaps he could be accused of not seeing 'the obvious', although chapter 2 shows that he was not ignorant of the signs of this, or of other matters elsewhere in the novel, which would have provided a counterpoint to the discussion. Candidates responding to this question appeared to have

insufficient overview and detailed knowledge of the text to be able to handle this question satisfactorily, though.

- (b) Again, not many candidates appeared to be prepared for this question. Marie Lebleye was the Astins' neighbour and cousin of Odile Lebleye, whom Bruno married, but it was Marie Germin who could be contrasted with Laure. Daniel narrates of her, 'cette camarade de Sorbonne que ma mère avait 'écartée' et que j'avais retrouvée parmi mes nouveaux collègues' in chapter 3, and 'quinze ans plus tôt ... j'espérais en faire ma fiancée ... ma mère ... avait murmuré: '... elle boite trop...' (Ch. 4). She lived in nearby Villemomble (Ch. 4) but told Daniel at the beginning of chapter 7, 'J'en avais assez, Daniel ... dans trois mois je demandais mon changement. Je serais partie à l'autre bout de la France pour ne plus te voir jamais'. He spends an evening with her in chapter 7 prompted by discovering his daughter, 'Louise embrassée quand Marie ne l'était pas!', after which Marie gives him an ultimatum: 'si je ne deviens pas ta femme, je ne resterai pas ta maîtresse'. At the end of chapter 10 we learn with Daniel, 'Elle a demandé son changement; elle est nommée à Perpignan.'

Laure, Daniel's sister-in-law, served the Astin family after Gisèle's death, and Daniel finally marries her in chapter 30 as a way to resolve everyone's living arrangements after Mamette's death, and when Bruno and Odile married hastily. Candidates could discuss the roles of both Marie and Laure, and the differences between them in particular.

Question 8

Joffo: *Un sac de billes*

- (a) This was a popular question, and the text was usually well known. Detailed knowledge of the text enabled the best candidates to illustrate with insight. The question may have looked deceptively easy, when in fact it was quite subtle and challenging. Answers typically began well, justifying and illustrating each point carefully, but did not always manage to sustain the effort to the end of the answer. Most candidates saw the differences in age, outlook, maturity, sense of responsibility, etc. between the two brothers and showed the development in the boys, their courage, tenacity and increasing maturity. Most also saw their differences as complementary and a force for the good which helped their survival, as did their solidarity.

Maurice's courage and protective role was emphasised, but Joseph was just the younger sibling in tow. Too many candidates concentrated on the characters at the start of the novel, many being quicker to state that Joseph was a weaker character than Maurice because he cried when he lost his favourite marble than to comment on Joseph's strength of character at the end of the novel when he defied the Resistance fighters. It is a general weakness that candidates regard characters as fixed throughout a novel. Few thought to mention that the whole story is seen through Joseph's eyes hence we have a closer insight into his psyche, and Maurice is perceived from his standpoint. He is his junior, he defers to his brother on occasions, but he cannot know everything about him. He sees evidence of his actions and hears his words. The novelist does not give an impartial overview of each boy.

The importance of the differences was often neglected, and some candidates strayed into discussion of the brothers' similarities. There was a tendency to give one or two examples of the differences, followed by long passages on how united they were.

- (b) Candidates were not being asked to show any knowledge of other stories on the subject and some clearly realised this, but others merely offered general comments about the 'exceptional' quality of this novel, scoring low marks for vague and general answers with hardly any evidence of knowledge of the text. A small number of responses referred to the humour, but few were able to provide illustration of it. Candidates found it quite difficult to sustain visible relevance throughout, other than by repetition of 'succès extraordinaire'. Nevertheless, most were able to present some sound arguments to explain the popularity of the text with some presenting a comprehensive response.

Responses were wide-ranging but displayed much enthusiasm for the text, the suspense, the emotions, the (almost) happy ending and the lessons taught by the novel. More able candidates planned their essays thoughtfully and avoided storytelling by judicious choice of topics for discussion. The most rewarding mentioned that it was an autobiography and therefore related a true story; that war was seen through the eyes of a ten year old, which was fairly unusual and

touching; the sense of adventure and suspense enticed the reader to read on and to root for the two main characters; that there was no recrimination but a message of hope at the end and also a warning that this might happen again and that we should be prepared.