

LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

Paper 0486/11
Poetry and Prose

Key messages

For success in this examination, candidates need to:

- Read the questions carefully and identify the key words
- Use these words as a framework for their answers
- Provide textual reference in support of their points
- Select appropriate quotations and comment on them
- Explore how writers achieve their effects through language, imagery and structure
- Know the texts extremely well.

They need to avoid:

- Overlong and elaborate introductions and conclusions that sometimes make the same points in the same way
- Introducing unnecessary biographical information about the writer
- Writing at length about historical contexts at the expense of close attention to the extract
- Over-elaborate assertions about the effects of punctuation
- Identifying literary features without explaining their effects
- Quotation without comment.

General comments

There was much to commend in this session's entries, and there were many excellent responses characterised by a detailed knowledge of the text, careful sustained focus on the demands of the question, and intelligent and well-selected reference to the text, incorporating thorough analysis of such references in order to show how writers succeed in creating the effects they strive for in their writing. Quotation in the best answers was neatly embedded in the argument itself.

There were very few examples of apparently 'unseen' work offered; practically all of the candidates seem to have studied the texts. It is worth pointing out to candidates that lack of knowledge of the relevant texts will reveal itself very quickly. Even if only brief, reference to the context of the relevant passage will demonstrate a more confident command of the question.

As usual, however, by far the most regular limitation noted was candidates' unwillingness or inability to answer precisely what they are asked in the questions. This was particularly prevalent in responses to poetry, and more will be mentioned on this in the relevant section below. It was also seen in extract based questions where some candidates worked through the material without reference to the thrust of the question. As has been mentioned in previous reports, it is vital that candidates do not ignore the intensifiers in questions, words such as 'powerful', 'memorable', 'striking' as they are intended to give focus to their responses.

Less high achieving answers, as ever, made arguable and unsupported assertions and often substituted response to the question with a good deal of unnecessary, often biographical, preamble. This was particularly evident in responses to classic texts and authors, where some candidates simply repeat what they have learned from study guides. Points were often left un-argued, or quotation was offered without any indication of what it was meant to illustrate. A major limitation in answering is the use of explanatory narrative, or paraphrase, and there was still much evidence of it this year. Centres would be advised to counsel their candidates to avoid making general statements and, instead, ensure that from the outset their response is tightly directed to what the question asks for. Using the question to 'frame' the answer, and then

occasional re-focusing during the response using the key words of the question provides a sensible if basic strategy to keep answers on track and avoid irrelevance.

Further to this, it was pleasing to see candidates able to quote from the 'closed' prose texts, though more training in the use of quotation to support and illuminate a point would be valuable for many. Too often quotations seemed to be picked almost at random without any reference to their context and sometimes left out key words which contradicted the point that they were supposed to demonstrate, especially in poetry answers. It is not enough to merely make a statement and then put in a roughly appropriate quotation without further comment.

Another perennial issue is that, while candidates can recognise certain aspects of versification such as enjambment and caesura, they feel that merely identifying examples without commenting on their effects or, on some occasions simply asserting that the writer uses these devices without any illustration at all, will gain them marks. Similarly there was a lot of reference to hyperbole, anaphora and various other devices without any consideration of how they are used. Too many terms (e.g. personification) were used very loosely. Punctuation was often given too much importance and treated in isolation from meaning, and 'negative semantic fields' and 'negative images' identified without any explanation of why this might be.

There were still a number of candidates who answered several questions rather than just one poetry question and one prose question. Given the number of marks they tended to be dealing with, this severely impacted on their performance. Assuming all schools run full trial/mock exams, they need to make sure that candidates are fully acquainted with the format and rubric of the question paper.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Poetry

Poetry questions require candidates to explore in detail how writers convey their feelings. All six of the questions use the word 'How?' or the phrase 'In what ways?' and follow these by asking for a response to the methods employed by the poet. Candidates should be aware that they will therefore need to mention the poet regularly, and direct their answer frequently to the ways that the writer is working. Often, poetry answers get stuck at explaining what is happening in the poem – offering an overview of what the poet 'is saying' or 'trying to say' – or forget to mention the writer at all, an approach which good answers avoid. To answer the question 'How?' or 'In what ways?' a good deal of analysis of the poet's language is essential. It will always be more effective than general comments about rhyme schemes or caesuras or punctuation – claims for the effects of which were being regularly asserted, but very rarely substantiated with argument. There were lots of explanatory approaches for all the poetry questions, making it difficult to reward exploration of language and effects. Answers which analyse the effect of the poet's use of language and direct that material to the terms of the question are key to accessing the higher bands.

As ever, candidates showed a fascination with Hardy's relationship with his wife Emma which in many cases distracted them from the central thrust of the question.

Hardy

Question 1 *On the Departure Platform* was far less popular than *Neutral Tones* and generally candidates seemed to have difficulty in seeing it as a poem about a couple parting. They wanted to relate it to the death of Hardy's wife and, mostly unsuccessfully, tried to manipulate the material to fit that interpretation. Only a very few tried to directly answer the question and to show how the language creates strong visual images of the departure, and of the woman and of the ambience of the railway station. There were even fewer attempts to explain how this is made moving.

Question 2 *Neutral Tones* also produced a lot of answers which spent too long discussing Hardy's relationship with Emma in setting a context for the response to the question, despite the fact that the poem was written before they first met. Better answers were able to home in on the requirements of the question – the writing, and how it 'vividly conveys' bitter feelings. Good answers concentrated on the word-choice, the images and their effects, focused on feelings, and often were able to discuss the force of Fate in the poem and how Hardy presents this and its effects on him. There was a common tendency to over-interpret: in stanza one, the leaves had fallen from an ash. Candidates either ignored or did not know that the ash is a tree, and there were several interpretations which overplayed the symbolism. In the best answers there were some penetrating comments on the juxtaposition of 'smile' and 'deadest' and on the 'grin of bitterness'.

Poems Deep and Dangerous

Question 3 on *First Love* was very popular, and generally quite well answered. The content of the poem was well understood though only the better answers saw the possibility that the love was unrequited. The 'clay' metaphor yielded several interpretations and lines 16 and 17 weren't very satisfactorily understood, but candidates did well with the pain of sudden first love. Some strong responses saw beyond the conventional idea of love at first sight and produced strongly coherent answers which dealt very well with the distraction of the speaker.

Question 4 Candidates liked the poem *Registers* and understood the sweet sadness behind it. They were able to explore the father's fears and also his understanding that this is a necessary step in Jack's life. Good answers explored the implications of 'Jack's gone' and of 'Good boy' and of the child 'diminishing down the long corridors into the huge unknown'. There were some very competent analyses of the language of the poem, though few noticed the ominous sharpness of the teacher's name.

Songs of Ourselves

Question 5 *For My Grandmother Knitting* was also a very popular choice but there was a lot of over-interpretation here: the family don't want her to hurt herself; she misses her youth. Too many didn't read the question carefully and missed 'affectionate'. They seemed to think that the family scorned the grandmother. Some thought it was the grandmother who was affectionate. Some strong answers built their responses around the motif of hands which recurs through the poem. The general tone of the poem seemed to elude most candidates though there were some very good answers which were thoroughly engaged by it.

Question 6 '*She was a Phantom of Delight*' required a tight focus on the imagery of the poem. Generally candidates understood the ethereal nature of the woman in the first stanza and how this conveys the poet's awe and his feeling that she is perhaps out of reach, but were less secure with the second and third stanzas. Truncated quotation in the second stanza led to some distortion of meaning: 'A Creature not too bright or good' without the subsequent line leads to a rather disparaging view of the wife. Some felt that the wife turned harsh and full of flaws in stanza 2 and explored that idea rather unproductively. Many thought the wife died at the end, but could support that reasonably well with evidence from the text.

Section B: Prose

No Longer at Ease

Question 7 This was not a popular text, but this was the most frequently seen question on it. Answers were generally not very accomplished. Almost all re-told the story up to this point, trying to explain why Obi's return home is moving, but telling it at too-great length. Most answers recognised the moving element of Obi's mother's state of health, and the force of the final sentence in the extract. Some stronger answers were able to compare the descriptions of father's and mother's rooms and recognise some poignancy in the contrast between them.

Question 8 appeared very rarely and thus it is not possible to make any meaningful comment. There were a few attempts to use the passage in order to answer but these were obviously unproductive.

Northanger Abbey

Question 9 also appeared very rarely and so it is difficult to make generalisations about performance. Candidates might have considered Catherine's hope of a walk with Miss Tilney and her disappointment at the rain, and the unlooked for arrival of the Thorpes and the projected trip to Blaize castle. John Thorpe is particularly domineering and lies about seeing the Tilneys. He refuses to listen to her pleas to stop the carriage and she becomes increasingly agitated. His objectionable speech and behaviour does not endear him to the reader, and makes sympathy for Catherine easy to feel. A few stronger candidates responded with some vehemence to John Thorpe's overbearing behaviour and were able to use this as a basis for a solid answer. The key word in the question was 'How?' and only candidates who looked closely at the writing would have given themselves the chance of a high mark.

Question 10 No responses to this question were seen but candidates might have referred to the General's concern for the well-being of Eleanor and his desire for his son to make a good marriage. Henry sees him as a good husband if not always as attentive as he might have been. He is clearly only nice to Catherine because he thinks she is an heiress, however, and is ruthless in evicting her from Northanger when he finds

that he was mistaken. He is clearly motivated by money and position. The best answers would have given a balanced view with careful evaluation and support.

Silas Marner

Question 11 was only attempted by a few candidates. They needed to consider the context – the passage follows on from a reflection on Nancy’s refusal to consider adopting a child (Eppie) and a sense of tension in the immediate neighbourhood, and the fact that it is the resolution of the plot-line concerning Dunstan, the solution to the mystery of his disappearance and of the robbing of Marner. It also prompts Godfrey to reveal at last that he is Eppie’s father which Nancy responds to with compassion and forgiveness, in contrast with Godfrey’s expectation. Again the key word is ‘How?’ and so mere narrative did not go very far towards meeting the demands of the question. The dialogue and the authorial comment is what makes the passage powerful.

Question 12 No examples of this question were seen but candidates might have referred to Silas’s life when he first arrives in Raveloe, Dolly’s support when Eppie first comes into his life and her advice and practical help. They might also have explored their conversations about religion and trust.

Spies

Question 13 Candidates might have referred to the context – the search for Germans and the following of Keith’s mother, the mystery of what the boys think is a tramp in the tunnel, Stephen’s anxiety about proving himself to Keith and the frustration of both boys in not finding what they were looking for and their cruelty to the ‘tramp’ in banging on the corrugated iron. Responses often revealed a lack of understanding of the situation, and appeared to treat the extract as an ‘unseen’, with inevitably self-limiting consequences. Few moved beyond descriptions of events to consider the qualities of the writing.

Question 14 There were a few responses and candidates seemed to like Barbara. She is a vivid character in the annoying way in which she turns up and expects to join in with Stephen’s activities, making him want to know ‘Why are girls like this?’. She has a way of shedding common sense on some of his and Keith’s more fanciful ideas; she actually understands what is going on between Keith’s mother and ‘her boyfriend’, but she is a threat in that she is prepared to tell on them. She is memorable because of the humour with which she is portrayed and the effect she has on the boys.

I’m the King of the Castle

Question 15 was quite popular. Candidates thought they should furnish a quick (or in some cases, lengthy) rundown on ‘what has happened so far.’ Most explained what Kingshaw was feeling rather than analysed the text. The focus of the question is on Kingshaw’s tormented state of mind, and the best answers looked closely at the writing. Candidates who did so often identified pathetic fallacy in the description of the weather. A few picked up on the discrepancies of time (‘It was gone nine o’clock’ and ‘After a time he thought, it’s only about eight o’clock’) and used this observation to explore how Kingshaw is desperately trying to find some resolve.

Question 16 was much less popular and several candidates seemed to think that the passage for **Question 15** took place at Leydell, which was obviously self-limiting. They might have referred to Kingshaw’s initial fear on arrival at the castle, the way in which his confidence in climbing the ruins contrasts with Hooper’s fear of heights, or the events leading to Hooper’s fall. The significance lies in the fact that for a moment Kingshaw seems to be in a state of supremacy, but this is very short-lived. It compounds the effect of his mother’s lack of concern in that he is blamed for the fall despite having tried to help Hooper, and it makes his life even more miserable.

The English Teacher

Question 17 Not many responses to this question were seen. Most candidates caught the tenderness of the relationship (although one thought Krishna was a horrible, harsh father) but weren’t able to discuss ‘vividly’ adequately. They might have explored the context: the immediate aftermath of Susila’s death. Leela has just been told by her father that her mother must have been taken away to the hospital. Leela’s playfulness, and her innocent ignorance of circumstances are quite moving, as is the dialogue between the father and daughter and Krishna’s feelings as outlined in the final paragraph.

Question 18 The Headmaster’s teaching methods and his obvious love of children might have been attractive to candidates, although they might have found his school utterly chaotic. His home life might not

have elicited such favourable responses since his indifference to his wife and children – and his ultimate rejection of them – could be considered to be reprehensible. The few candidates who attempted this question, however, were usually able to arrive at a fairly balanced assessment, sometimes making good use of the headmaster's own account of how he came to be in his evidently unhappy marriage. His friendship affords comfort to Krishna and his stoical acceptance of his horoscope, and his reaction when it proves inaccurate, might be considered admirable.

Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde

Question 19 This was probably the most popular prose question. This is a particularly dense extract and most candidates only managed to comment on some of it, but it was often well done: comments on language were particularly productive. Many candidates were able to comment fruitfully on the description of the weather in the opening paragraph, with plenty of pathetic fallacy in evidence. Poole's words were examined in some detail by many, although some candidates were under the impression that a third character, the butler, was also present. Candidates who structured their answers appropriately were also able to make effective comment about the final paragraph of the extract, often drawing telling distinctions between 'self-destroyer' and its implications and 'suicide'.

Question 20 This question was also quite popular, and many were able to use the text quite analytically. Some answered as if confined to the extract, which was self-limiting, but they commented on Hyde's physical appearance, the brutality of his behaviour e.g. the trampling of the child, the Carew murder, Jekyll's loathing of his alter ego and the reactions of Utterson and Lanyon. There was often an impressive amount of detail in the exploration of sub-human and animal imagery as applied to descriptions of Hyde.

Stories of Ourselves

Question 21 Candidates tended to explain what goes on here rather than looking at Malamud's writing. Key elements were the suggestion throughout the story that Rose is something of a harridan and that Tommy is afraid of her, the purposelessness of his life, the memories that the girl stirs in him and his inability to articulate his thoughts and feelings and the helplessness that he feels. Where there was engagement with the writing rather than the narrative, it tended to focus in particular on the memory of Uncle Dom and its effect on Tommy, without going on to consider how that affected his subsequent thoughts about the girl.

Question 22 produced only a few responses, all of which explained the situation, although there was some attempt to comment on the word 'cubicles.' Relevant points were the masses of people and the over-crowded living conditions, the ruthlessness of the authorities in enforcing the regulations, the lack of expectation of Ward but the yearning for space, the selfishness with which he is exploited so that the room that he finds initially is eventually even more crowded than the one he has in the first place, and the overall sense of hopelessness.

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Further to this, it was pleasing to see candidates able to quote from the 'closed' prose texts, though more training in the use of quotation to support and illuminate a point would be valuable for many. Too often quotations seemed to be picked almost at random without any reference to their context and sometimes left out key words which contradicted the point that they were supposed to demonstrate, especially in poetry answers. It is not enough to merely make a statement and then put in a roughly appropriate quotation without further comment.

Another perennial issue is that, while candidates can recognise certain aspects of versification such as enjambment and caesura, they seem to feel that merely identifying examples without commenting on their effects or, on some occasions simply asserting that the writer uses these devices without any illustration at all, will gain them marks. Similarly there was a lot of reference to hyperbole, anaphora and various other devices without any consideration of how they are used. Too many terms (e.g. personification) were used very loosely. Punctuation was often given too much importance and treated in isolation from meaning, and 'negative semantic fields' and 'negative images' identified without any explanation of why this might be.

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Comments on specific questions

Section A: Poetry

Poetry questions require candidates to explore in detail how writers convey their feelings. All six of the questions use the word 'How?' or the phrase 'In what ways?' and follow these by asking for a response to the methods employed by the poet. Candidates should be aware that they will therefore need to mention the poet regularly, and direct their answer frequently to the ways that the writer is working. Often, poetry answers get stuck at explaining what is happening in the poem – offering an overview of what the poet 'is saying' or 'trying to say' – or forget to mention the writer at all, an approach which good answers avoid. To answer the question 'How?' or 'In what ways?' a good deal of analysis of the poet's language is essential. It will always be more effective than general comments about rhyme schemes or caesuras or punctuation – claims for the effects of which were being regularly asserted, but very rarely substantiated with argument. There were lots of explanatory approaches for all the poetry questions, making it difficult to reward exploration of language and effects. Answers which analyse the effect of the poet's use of language and direct that material to the terms of the question are key to accessing the higher bands.

As ever, candidates showed a fascination with Hardy's relationship with his wife Emma which in many cases distracted them from the central thrust of the question. They even related his bereavement to the winter in *The Darkling Thrush* which distracted a great deal from the harshness of winter, and their attempts to apply it to *At the Word 'Farewell'* resulted in some very strange and unconvincing interpretations.

Hardy

Question 1 Very few candidates found it difficult not to mention something appropriate from the poem *The Darkling Thrush* that revealed the harshness of winter and they generally showed understanding of a good deal of the poem. There was some useful analysis of the images of death and burial, and personification of Frost, Winter itself, and the Century. What was not present from a very large number was the required focus on Hardy and how his depiction of the season was 'vivid'. As mentioned above in the introductory remarks, this is part of a wider issue with poetry responses, and one which centres need to address head on. The language which Hardy uses needed to be explored in terms of its vivid, pictorial qualities, its ability to create and sustain mood, and its tone, in order to answer how vividly he writes.

Question 2 on *At the word 'Farewell'* produced a lot of answers which spent too long talking about Hardy's relationship with Emma in setting a context for the response to the question. Better answers were able to home in on the requirements of the question – the writing, and how it is 'moving' in how it conveys 'feelings'. Quite a number of responses to this poem seemed to be influenced by a critique of the poem prominent on the Internet, one which explains clearly the circumstances of the writing and makes a lot of general comments about rhyme and alliteration. In a few cases there seemed to be some learning by heart of some

of the response as it came out in much the same format from different candidates. The drawback here was that the original critique was explanatory and thus candidates who followed this were under-directing their material to what is asked, and did not explore the language sufficiently in comparison with the claims made for rhyme-schemes, use of caesura, punctuation etc. Competent answers concentrated on the word-choice, the images and their effects, focused on feelings, and often were able to discuss the force of Fate in the poem and how Hardy presents this and its effects on him.

Poems Deep and Dangerous

Question 3 on *Football after School* was another which often produced answers which revealed a good understanding of the content, and even enabled candidates to engage with some of the images, but which often left them stopping at explaining what they mean; not directing them to how they depict the mother's feelings, and – more pointedly – 'movingly' depict these. In fact there was often too little focus on the mother and too much on the son, and his growing up. High achieving answers explored the final stanza in detail, and its indications of the mother's own feelings of frailty, her inability to protect her son, and her worries he will share her own perceived failings – and, of course, the language through which these are presented at the end of the poem. Less confident answers omitted reference to this stanza at all, or contented themselves with an explanation of the sun/ball comparison.

Question 4 on *The Marriage of True Minds* was often fully explained, line by line, and good understanding was shown by most candidates who offered this; though there were a few brief, sketchy responses. The problem, as ever, was just that: the responses explained the poem. Candidates need to be aware that when a question asks them to 'explore' it expects more than to make clear the meaning. Very few responses really argued what was 'powerful' about the expression of 'what love means' in the poem, though there were implications made. There was much assertion that 'this is powerful' but the response clearly needs to do more if it is to answer on 'the ways' the writer 'makes' it 'powerful'. Frequently candidates made something of this in their response to Shakespeare's bullish final couplet, but conversely many answers ignored the last two lines completely.

Songs of Ourselves

Question 5 on *The Clod and the Pebble/Song* was this year's most frequent offering, and as such provided a wide range of quality in answers. There was no difficulty in understanding the surface meanings of both poems, but the best responses tackled the need to direct the material to answer 'how the poets write memorably about love'. This required not only close analysis of the language used, but also an argument of how striking and effective this is. Careful direction of the material characterised the best responses. Moderately developed responses often 'covered' some of this by implication rather than by overt comment, while low achieving answers rarely saw the need to focus on this at all until the end of the answer when it was asserted that both poets 'therefore' wrote memorably about love, the candidate having explained the content. Weaker responses included unsupported assertions about the innocence, purity and naivety (often employing such triplets) of the malleable and put-upon clod. The interpretation of the clod as 'female love' and the pebble as 'male love' was quite often seen, usually with no attempt at justification. There were some answers which did not fully understand the Wroth poem, and failed to pick up the image of love as a child, reading the poem literally as love of a child. More equated love with a man and speculated about Wroth's unhappy marriage. Both these approaches were self-limiting. Overall, most candidates did have some understanding of the poems, however, and were able to see the correspondence between *Song* and what the Pebble has to say in the Blake poem. Too often, though, there was unnecessary speculation on what Blake and Wroth had experienced personally at the hands of Love, and few attempts to explore the implications of the poems; for example, why Blake presents such diametrically opposed ideas about love and what love might actually mean to both poets.

Question 6 on *Tiger in the Menagerie* proved quite challenging to some candidates as they found it difficult to understand, but tried hard to explain. Ironically, had they made clear why they found it hard to understand, and illustrated this with detailed reference to the writing, this would have constituted a good answer to the question. There were many interpretations offered – many quite fanciful, some more plausible than others, but almost without exception asserted, under-supported with textual reference, and not properly directed to the terms of the question. For example the tiger represented a lover and the menagerie was a heart, or the tiger was our suppressed violent emotions and the menagerie was where we let them out, or the tiger had something (unspecified) to do with the colonisation of India. This might have seemed a challenging poem, but the question allowed candidates an opportunity to highlight the complexities. Unfortunately very few offered a probing, evaluative analysis of the language which would have helped them develop a relevant response. A few candidates did assert that it was deliberately confusing without specifying why this might be.

Section B: Prose

No Longer at Ease

Question 7 was not a particularly popular choice and the examples seen were usually quite limited in scope. The passage was rarely fully explored and when relevant material was located candidates made rather superficial comments on it. Contrasts were made between slum area and bright lights, there was sometimes a comment about the conversation between the night-soil man and the boy, but this rarely got beyond a statement of the content. A few responses explored the differences between idealism and reality represented in the differences between Obi's poem and the observed life in Lagos. Overall, there was too little made of the 'vivid' in the terms of the question and this restricted the effectiveness of most responses.

Question 8 appeared very rarely and thus it is not possible to make much meaningful comment. There was evidence that candidates were able to make a comment on the significance of the action, revealing the way things happened in Nigeria at this time.

Northanger Abbey

Question 9 provided some very well-argued and directed responses. In most some context was offered, and some reference to the satirising of the Gothic genre of novels which Catherine is obsessed by. The best answers explored the dramatic effect this conversation might be thought to have on the budding relationship between Catherine and Henry Tilney. There was close inspection of the language of the passage, and especially the multiple questions of Henry Tilney in the penultimate paragraph and Catherine rushing off in tears to her room at the end of the passage. Less successful answers often showed an awareness of the significance of the incident in Catherine's growing up, but tended to narrate and paraphrase.

Question 10 was less popular, but sensible choices of characters and occasions were generally made. Some less high achieving answers seemed to find it difficult to differentiate between foolishness and immorality in the case of John Thorpe. The question asks 'How?' and this caused some difficulty as it required detail of presentation that the candidates concerned found challenging to provide.

Silas Marner

Question 11 proved popular and there were some focused responses to this. Most candidates found Priscilla's bluntness entertaining and illustrated it from the passage, but often did not fully argue how it was 'entertaining', just left it to speak for itself. This was, by and large, the main limitation of answers to this question; candidates located very relevant material, quoted it but then did not develop the response fully enough to do themselves full justice. Very few got down to the level of looking at her language – dialect etc. – and thus responses, though relevant, were often a little underdeveloped. Catalogues of what was found entertaining formed the majority of responses, which were rarely supported / illustrated / explored. The passage needed a more thorough exploration to make the most of the question. Very few candidates looked at the whole passage, and thus the scope of their response was limited. The best answers showed how Eliot uses Priscilla as a complement to Nancy, and to provide light relief at a particularly tense moment in the novel.

Question 12 proved just as popular as **Question 11** and there were some well-developed responses to the two brothers Cass. High achieving answers were able to see that whilst not in the same league of villainy as Dunstan, Godfrey still had moral failings which made him far from a fully sympathetic character. Most answers did argue along these lines to a certain extent, and the better the relevant detail, and the direction to the terms of the question, the better the response became. There was some direct quotation of the authorial descriptions of the characters which was usually put to good use in introducing the answer. Candidates were scathing on Dunstan's immorality, and noted his blackmail and robbery. Less developed answers dealt this way with Dunstan, but then presented Godfrey too superficially as the sort of 'good brother' of this bad one.

Spies

Question 13 proved popular and the novel seemed to have been much enjoyed. Candidates were able to list a number of Stephen's feelings and were clearly aware of the situation described though a number made no attempt to contextualise the incident. Awkwardness, shock, and fear were all offered. Most realised he was embarrassed and then often went off into great detail about his 'sexual awakening' without arguing it. Too often however, candidates noted the feelings without fully analysing the text and commenting on the language and presentation that would have supported their response. Rather like in the Hill extract question,

breathless progress was made through the extract charting Stephen's feelings here and there, leading to disjointed and under-developed commentaries.

Question 14 There were very few attempts at this question so it is difficult to comment, though the few examples seen tended to start from the premise that Stephen's family compares unfavourably with Keith's in Stephen's eyes, at least in the early stages of the novel. As his eyes are opened to what is going on in the Hayward household he comes to appreciate his own parents much more and, though understated, their love and concern for him is very evident. They are also in their own way more exotic than the Haywards. Stephen's father is actually a German, and even possibly a spy for the British.

I'm the King of the Castle

Question 15 There were some good responses to how Kingshaw's unease was conveyed, though these were much less developed on how the unease was shown to be 'increasing'; most candidates seemed to ignore entirely this word in the question. Good answers covered a wide range of details, starting with noting the pathetic fallacy presaging ill, the reluctance of Kingshaw to enter the room, and revealed Kingshaw becoming more and more nervous, stammering, edging backwards to get out of the room, his imagination beginning to join the physical and contributing to what in the end seems to be presented as terror rather than 'unease'. Close reference to the language here produced detailed responses, and the few candidates who specifically pointed to the escalation in Kingshaw's fear – his breathing was mentioned in this context – did very well. Most candidates could find something relevant to say and as in **Question 13** less accomplished responses catalogued feelings of unease. Many wrote in very general terms about foreshadowing. Often candidates could not resist talking about Hooper in this context, and almost always this seemed to have the result of diluting the effectiveness of their response. Some less confident answers lost focus entirely and spent their time discussing Hooper and his bullying.

Question 16 was much less popular. Many answers broadened the question to talk about Fielding, his mother, his house and his family in general. Candidates who did this said less about the boy and what made him memorable, and seemed to penalise themselves by limiting relevant material. Most wanted to give a character sketch, and thus the answer was not directed sufficiently to develop a fully relevant response. There were some sensible comments on how he is used by Hill as a contrast to Hooper and to Kingshaw, and some very good answers picked up on the symbolism of his name and the farm.

The English Teacher

Question 17 was popular but candidates did not seem aware of what 'revealing' expected of them. Very few attempted to discuss what the conversation brought to light about the background, the lives, and the philosophies of the characters concerned. Mostly candidates retold the conversation, explaining Krishna's and the Headmaster's views in very broad terms, and claimed this is what was revealed about the characters. What was needed was inference from the 'dialogue' about what is important to these men – their passions and what makes them 'tick'. What was offered was what they say to each other.

Question 18 Few candidates offered relevant detail of Susila's sickness and subsequent death, or explored the 'moving' nature of these events. There was knowledge of how Susila contracted the disease, there was on occasion some awareness of the progression of the disease, and at times there was a description of her funeral. But mostly these were described without direction to the terms of the question. Answers tended to consider the relationship of Krishna and Susila in general, starting with the family apart and then discussing their happiness on 'convening', as it were. The illness and death of Susila was then merely fed into this narrative, and Krishna and Leela noted as affected. Much more detailed exploration was needed to make this a relevant developed response.

Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde

Question 19 was very popular and a wide range of quality of responses were seen. Good answers looked at the whole passage, carefully selecting material which indicated Jekyll's diversionary tactics – the side-swipe at Lanyon, his reticence in talking at all about Hyde, and in particular of the terms of his will, and – at the end of the passage – the request that Utterson helps Hyde when Jekyll is no more. All of these add a sense of mystery to the novel at this point, all cause the reader to be 'intrigued'. These elements and more were carefully pointed out by high achieving candidates who were able to support with well-selected textual reference, such as the way Jekyll turns 'pale' on hearing of Utterson's investigations of Hyde. Less capable candidates were often a little less comfortable with the idea of 'intriguing', though most were able to point out at least some of the mysterious reactions that are catalogued in this extract. A small number of very underdeveloped responses totally missed the point and merely narrated what was happening in the extract

without pointing their answers. A lot of weaker answers were far too dependent on hindsight: at this moment we do not know that Jekyll and Hyde are the same person.

Question 20 was less popular and less well handled. There were many examples of candidates trying to answer using, sometimes exclusively, the passage for **Question 19**, with predictably self-penalising results as there is very much limited relevance in it to the terms of **Question 20**. Many candidates seemed as if they prepared to answer a question on 'dualism', on which there was obviously a great deal of learned material, and also on the repressiveness of Victorian society, and wrote about those topics regardless. Only a minority of candidates offered a balanced response, seeking both to feel sorry for Jekyll and to question the wisdom and legitimacy of his pursuits in creating the character who ultimately destroys him. These answers were able to explore, at times, the way in which feelings change about Jekyll over the course of the novel. The most accomplished answers were able to support these arguments with aptly chosen quotation – but as stated, such responses were few and far between.

Stories of Ourselves

Question 21 on *To Da-duh, in Memoriam* produced some well-focused responses but also much general explanatory material. Confident responses were able to keep the focus on 'moving' and to select appropriate material from the passage. These responses also managed to see something moving about the effects on the grand-daughter rather than just the, maybe more obvious, effects on the originally proud Da-duh. Less developed responses were often just a plain running-through of the story, making a few observations on the sadness of the old lady's demise. Such answers did not stop to consider the feelings of the narrator. This question produced more apparently 'unseen' attempts than any other on the paper.

Question 22 on *Sredni Vashtar* was occasionally quite well handled, particularly on the 'serious' side. Candidates who achieved highly were often alive to the concept of 'poetic justice'. They were able to see that the treatment of the seemingly terminally ill Conradin was at best insensitive and at worst totally unacceptable, and hence the story had a very serious side to it; and whilst the bringing about of the death of Mrs de Ropp was also certainly serious, there was something grimly comic about the fact that she gets her comeuppance, ironically dying before her ill cousin. There was some evidence of candidates relishing the removal of Mrs de Ropp in the way that Conradin did. The fact that it is the writing itself – the tone and the detail – that makes this story so really amusing seemed beyond most candidates to explore, however. There was too little focus on the language of the passage to handle this side of the story.

LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

Paper 0486/13

Paper 13 Poetry and Prose

Key messages

For success in this examination, candidates need to:

- Read the questions carefully and identify the key words
- Use these words as a framework for their answers
- Provide textual reference in support of their points
- Select appropriate quotations and comment on them
- Explore how writers achieve their effects through language and imagery.

They need to avoid:

- Overlong and elaborate introductions and conclusions
- Introducing unnecessary biographical information about the writer
- Writing at length about historical contexts without paying attention to the extract
- Over-elaborate assertions about the effects of punctuation
- Identifying literary features without explaining their effects
- Quotation without comment.

General comments

There was much to commend in this session's entries, and there were many excellent responses characterised by a detailed knowledge of the text, careful sustained focus on the demands of the question, and intelligent and well-selected reference to the text, incorporating thorough analysis of such references in order to show how writers succeed in creating the effects they strive for in their writing. Quotation in the best answers was neatly embedded in the argument itself.

There were very few examples of apparently 'unseen' work offered; practically all of the candidates seem to have studied the texts. It is worth pointing out to candidates that lack of knowledge of the relevant texts will reveal itself very quickly. Even if only brief, reference to the context of the relevant passage will demonstrate a more confident command of the question.

As usual, however, by far the most regular limitation noted was candidates' unwillingness or inability to answer precisely what they are asked in the questions. This was particularly prevalent in responses to poetry, and more will be mentioned on this in the relevant section below. As has been mentioned in previous reports, it is vital that candidates do not ignore the intensifiers in questions, words such as 'powerful', 'memorable', 'striking', as they are intended to give focus to their responses.

Less high achieving answers made arguable and unsupported assertions and often substituted response to the question with a good deal of unnecessary, often biographical, preamble. Points were often left unargued, or quotation was offered without any indication what it was meant to illustrate. A major limitation in answering is the use of explanatory narrative, or paraphrase, and there was still much evidence of it this year. Centres would be advised to counsel their candidates to avoid making general statements and, instead, ensure that from the outset their response is tightly directed to what the question asks for. Using the question to 'frame' the answer, and then occasional re-focusing during the response using the key words of the question provides a sensible if basic strategy to keep answers on track and avoid irrelevance.

Further to this, it was pleasing to see candidates able to quote from the 'closed' prose texts, though more training in the use of quotation to support and illuminate a point would be valuable for many. Too often quotations seemed to be picked almost at random without any reference to their context and sometimes left

out key words, which contradicted the point that they were supposed to demonstrate, especially in poetry answers. It is not enough to merely make a statement and then put in a roughly appropriate quotation without further comment.

Another perennial issue is that, while candidates can recognise certain aspects of versification such as enjambment and caesura, they seem to feel that merely identifying examples without commenting on their effects will gain them marks. Similarly there was a lot of reference to hyperbole, anaphora and various other devices without any consideration of how they are used. Too many terms (e.g. personification) were used very loosely. Punctuation was often given too much importance and treated in isolation from meaning.

One noticeable phenomenon this session was the number of generic misidentifications made by candidates. In part, at least, this may be caused by the stress of the examination room, but so many candidates, in particular in responses to **Question 19**, referred to 'the play' that Examiners wondered whether candidates had studied a dramatisation of the novella.

There were still a number of candidates who answered several questions rather than just one poetry question and one prose question. Given the number of marks they tended to be dealing with, this severely impacted on their performance. Presumably all Schools run full trial/mock exams, but they need to make sure that candidates are fully acquainted with the format and rubric of the question paper.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Poetry questions require candidates to explore in detail how writers convey their feelings. All six of the questions use the word 'How?' or the phrase 'In what ways?' and follow this by asking for a response to the methods employed by the poet. Candidates should be aware that they will therefore need to mention the poet regularly, and direct their answer frequently to the ways that the writer is working. Often, poetry answers get stuck at explaining what is happening in the poem – offering an overview of what the poet 'is saying' or 'trying to say' – or forget to mention the writer at all, an approach which good answers avoid. To answer the question 'How?' or 'In what ways?' a good deal of analysis of the poet's language is essential. It will always be more effective than general comments about rhyme schemes or caesuras or punctuation – claims for the effects of which were being regularly asserted, but very rarely substantiated with argument. Answers which analyse the effect of the poet's use of language and direct that material to the terms of the question are key to accessing the higher bands.

This year, most candidates appeared to be rather better prepared than in some previous sessions in that they were able to move beyond identifying literary features to comment in some detail on the effects they produce. One particular aspect which was noticeable this year was that a significant minority of candidates were able to comment meaningfully on rhythm and rhyme scheme in those terms.

As ever, candidates showed a fascination with Hardy's relationship with his wife Emma which in many cases distracted them from the central thrust of the question.

Question 1

How does Hardy powerfully depict the loss of the Titanic in The Convergence of the Twain?

This was quite a popular question, perhaps surprisingly as it is a relatively long poem. However, this seemed to encourage candidates to avoid a 'run-through' approach and instead to comment selectively. There were plenty of responses which recognised themes of human vanity, fate, wealth and the power of nature, and commented fruitfully on the images of the vessel lying on the ocean floor invaded by sea creatures. The sexual undertone of the 'intimate welding' and 'consummation' was often noted, and the increasing tension of the later stanzas was well identified by many.

Question 2

How does Hardy make you feel sympathy for the speakers in 'I Look Into My Glass' and Nobody Comes?

In general, candidates appeared slightly more confident about the first poem than the second. The themes of loneliness and old age were well recognised, although some candidates were under the impression that Hardy was in a bar rather than looking into a mirror. The contrast between the physical shrinkage and the emotional susceptibility was often well identified. Some candidates found some of the language in *Nobody Comes* rather opaque, although the idea of the lonely figure waiting was generally recognised. Biographical background featured prominently in many responses, although there were various interpretations of what that was.

Both questions on Hardy proved popular, and produced very similar levels of performance from candidates.

Question 3

How does Armitage strikingly portray the speaker's relationship with his wife in In Our Tenth Year?

This was rather unevenly handled. Most candidates recognised that the harebell had some symbolic value, although there was a wide range of interpretations as to what that was. Candidates offered a range of interpretations of the relationship, although nearly all recognised that it had changed. The ambiguities of the poem were acknowledged by some higher achieving answers, and most were able to engage with some of the poem's use of language. Candidates found it easy to offer a personal response to what they perceived the relationship to be, and there was evident enjoyment of Armitage's writing.

Question 4

How does Heaney make Follower such a moving poem?

Most candidates recognised the role reversal in the final stanza of this poem, although its nature was not always fully understood. This was a popular question, although not always successfully handled. There was some confusion about Heaney taking over his father's work, and some thought father and son did not love each other. There was some sound analysis of the way in which the father's expertise was presented, sometimes going on to comment on the son's clumsiness. However, few candidates went as far as to explore the emotions and deeper implications of the poem's final lines. One important discriminator was the extent to which candidates addressed the word 'moving'. Plenty of candidates were able to offer an explanation of what the poem is 'about', without going on to demonstrate why that was moving.

Question 5

Explore some of the ways in which Chong creates a sense of admiration in this poem.

Candidates who opted for this question almost universally demonstrated a sound knowledge of the poem's subject matter, and many responses demonstrated a strong sense of patriotism and pride. The recognition of the merlion was clear, and its force as an emblem of Singaporean identity was often discussed at considerable length. This often led to lengthy paraphrase and explanation of the nation's evolution and development, often showing heartfelt personal response. What was too often missing, however, was sufficient attention to 'the ways in which' admiration is created. Some high achieving responses managed to combine a demonstration of their knowledge of subject matter with a telling analysis of the ways in which Chong creates admiration, and, indeed, of what is being admired – the merlion or the nation it represents.

Question 6

How does Wroth strikingly convey her attitude to love in this poem?

This was the most popular of the poetry questions, and elicited many strong responses. Nearly all candidates recognised the poet's attitude, and often incorporated what was presumably taught knowledge of the autobiographical dimension into their answers. Candidates often offered an explanatory account of the poem, working through stanza by stanza. Some less successful responses interpreted the poem as advice on good parenting, but most recognised the central metaphor. Some candidates wrote about men, supporting their comments by references from the poem, and often affirming the validity of Wroth's observations and advice from personal experience. The question – and the poem – often provoked engaged

responses, although in many instances, the focus on 'How' could have been sharper: relatively few commented on form and rhyme. Those who did were able to identify effects tellingly.

Section B

Although the extract questions continue to be more popular than the discursive options for the obvious reason that the candidate has the textual details to hand while answering, it is encouraging to note that, at least for some texts and questions, the take up of the discursive option is increasing, and that a significant number of candidates are confident enough to tackle such a question. Of course, some candidates attempt to answer the discursive option using only the extract, an approach which is invariably self-limiting. However this was less prevalent than in previous sessions, and was a noteworthy phenomenon only in **Questions 14** and **20**.

Question 7

Explore the ways in which Achebe makes this moment dramatic and revealing.

This was the more popular question on what is a minority choice of text. Candidates recognised the moment as a key point in the novel, and many noted the significance of the changes in language. Mr Mark's intentions were generally understood, together with Obi's attitude at this point of the novel, and stronger responses hinted at the irony of his later failure to keep to his ideals as part of what was 'dramatic and revealing'. Less accomplished answers merely explained what was happening. The last part of the extract tended to be overlooked.

Question 8

How does Achebe vividly convey Obi's changing feelings towards Nigeria in the novel?

Few candidates attempted this option, and it tended to elicit narrative accounts of Obi's history rather than his feelings. Knowledge of the early part of the novel was evident, although the process by which the ending was reached was seldom discussed. When feelings were discussed, the 'how' of the question was not often addressed. One or two candidates used the evidence of Obi's poem written in England in developing their response, and some used the developments in his relationship with Clara and his family's reaction to his involvement with her to organise their answer.

Question 9

How does Austen's writing make you agree with Catherine's opinion of Isabella at this moment in the novel?

Although another minority choice of text, responses to this question were generally sound. Most candidates recognised and were suitably condemnatory of Isabella's hypocrisy, and responded with enthusiasm to the scales falling from Catherine's eyes. The characters involved, male and female, were well understood, and there was suitable textual support for points made, with some consideration of some of Austen's literary devices. There was evidence of real personal engagement in many of the answers.

Question 10

How does Austen make the goodness of the Morland family vivid for you?

This was less popular than the extract question, with relatively few responses seen. Answers were often general, with some lack of detail, and limited differentiation between family members. Their relatively humble origins were usually the basis for some comment, as were their affections for each other, although the opportunity to contrast them with the Tilneys for example was not taken.

Question 11

How does Eliot make this such a moving portrayal of Dolly?

Another less popular text, but candidates who approached the extract question seemed divided between those who used the extract very effectively to identify those features of Dolly's presentation which demonstrated her sympathy, tact, simple faith and good heartedness, and those who became side-tracked into recounting Silas's experiences. When candidates engaged with the richness of the extract, and in particular with Dolly's idiolect, they tended to achieve highly.

Question 12

Explore the ways in which Eliot makes William Dane's betrayal of Silas such a powerful and significant part of the novel.

Candidates almost all recognised that this was a pivotal event in the novel, although few were able to go on to explore how or why in detail. Textual knowledge was demonstrated by one very strong response which ranged widely over the text, including Silas's later return for 'closure', but such confident grasp of the detail of the novel was rare.

Question 13

How does Frayn make this conversation between Stephen and Barbara such an amusing moment in the novel?

This was the more popular question on a popular new text, and was often well handled. There were some very accomplished responses understanding Barbara's role and the ways in which she out-manoeuvres Stephen, as well as recognising, better than the character himself at this juncture, the way she awakens Stephen's pre-adolescent awareness of girls. Refreshingly, many candidates recognised the amusing qualities of the extract and were able to provide suitable evidence and analysis. The effects of the misunderstandings over 'privet' were at least partly understood by most. Some candidates were rather censorious of Stephen, in particular, for his 'childish' behaviour, perhaps forgetting that at the time of the incident, Stephen is indeed a child.

Question 14

*Explore **two** moments in the novel which Frayn makes particularly shocking for you.*

Perhaps surprisingly, this was one of the prose texts where a significant minority of candidates attempted to answer using only the extract. In this case, the extract provided limited material that could be described as 'shocking' in comparison with other parts of the novel, making the decision to use only the material printed on the paper even more self-limiting than usual. Those who used the whole novel tended to select the beating on the corrugated iron roof in the tunnel and the bayonet incident when Keith cuts Stephen. Another popular choice was the moment with Keith's father and the basket, where Stephen initially stands firm against the man, an incident where candidates empathised with Stephen's torn loyalties.

Question 15

How does Hill's writing vividly convey Kingshaw's thoughts and feelings at this point in the novel?

This was one of the most popular questions on the paper, and was often well handled. Candidates often showed a clear and perceptive understanding of Kingshaw's character, and made insightful comments about how, even when things seemed to be going well, the slightest setback plunged him into fear and self-doubt. A key discriminator here was the extent to which candidates were able to recognise the flashback and the effects it created. Stronger responses often made telling use of the details, such as Kingshaw's memory of the smell of them all as they stood together. In some cases, the paragraph in which he contemplates his wart infested hand was analysed with considerable sensitivity to show how Hill demonstrates Kingshaw's character, with its fears and inhibitions here. Others merely asserted that he wanted to pass the wart on to Hooper, demonstrating a rather superficial reading. Less confident candidates appeared to be confused as to what happened in the flashback, and its significance. There was quite a lot of use of pathetic fallacy in relation to the description of the wood and the weather, often used tellingly to mirror Kingshaw's feelings. Weaker answers merely asserted its presence. Some strong responses wrote critically on sentence structure, in particular the use of short sentences for effect. There was a strong sense that the book had been generally well taught and understood.

Question 16

Who does Hill's writing suggest is most to blame for Kingshaw's death at the end of the novel?

This was one of the most popular non-extract questions, and was frequently well answered. The invitation to present and evaluate evidence was accepted by the majority of candidates who attempted it, perhaps realising that there is not a 'right' answer. For some, the question was re-framed to be: 'How far is Hooper (or

Mrs Kingshaw) to blame for Kingshaw's suicide?' Candidates demonstrated sound knowledge of the text, with full coverage of bullying incidents attributable to Hooper, and of Mrs Kingshaw's wilful ignorance of the situation between the two boys. Many noted Hooper's triumph at the discovery of Kingshaw's body, and of Mrs Kingshaw's concern for Hooper at this moment. A good number of responses argued that Kingshaw is at least partly the agent of his own downfall, sometimes remarking on the contrast between Hooper's remorselessness and Kingshaw's kinder behaviour in Hang Wood or at Leydell Castle. Candidates generally took advantage of the opportunity to present an organised and argued point of view, and there were many accomplished responses to this question. Particular venom was reserved in many answers for Mrs Kingshaw, about whom few had a kind word. In contrast, a significant number found some excuse for Hooper's sociopathy in his upbringing.

Question 17

How does Narayan vividly convey Krishna's state of mind at this moment in the novel?

Candidates who attempted this question generally understood that Krishna's state of mind is one of anxiety and panic, and recognised the context of his wife and daughter's arrival. Only a few went on to demonstrate the 'vividly' of the question by looking at the dialogue and understanding Narayan's humour. This meant that few candidates reached the higher bands in the mark range. However, there were some attempts to write productively about other aspects of Narayan's technique, such as varied sentence structure and paragraph length.

Question 18

How far does Narayan make you sympathise with the Headmaster's wife in the novel?

The few who attempted this question generally found her difficult to sympathise with, showing some awareness of how she is presented. Some sought to sympathise with her being neglected by her husband, although few were able to offer much specific evidence in support of their assertions. Some lost direction and went on to consider how far the Headmaster himself was a sympathetic character. There was very little consideration of authorial technique ('How far does Narayan make you...').

Question 19

How does Stevenson make this such a dramatic and significant moment in the novel?

This was the most popular question in the prose section of the paper, and was often well handled. The dramatic significance of the scene was generally well grasped, as was the nature of the impending discovery. The characters involved were usually adequately understood, and there was plenty of attention to the note, the indication of someone snapping under tension, the drugs, the mask, the description of Hyde, Poole's reactions and his loyalty to Jekyll. The build-up of dramatic tension between Poole and Utterson leading to the decision to break down the door was often very closely analysed. Some stronger answers saw the significance of Poole's ongoing gradual realisation of the truth. Conversely, there were several answers which relied rather heavily on narration, answering the 'How' only indirectly, if at all.

Question 20

Explore the ways in which Stevenson hints that Jekyll and Hyde are the same person as the novel progresses.

A popular alternative to the extract question, this saw several candidates lapse into narrative description, giving little if any attention to Stevenson's writing. Most candidates identified at least some of the hints that are strewn through the novella; the cheque signed by Jekyll, the will, the remnant of Jekyll's cane at the murder scene. There were some who added to that the change in Jekyll's countenance when Hyde is mentioned, picking up on some of the descriptive details. A number of responses confined themselves solely to the **Question 19** extract. It is worth noting that answers which are based entirely on the passage are self-limiting.

Question 21

How does Shadbolt make this conversation between the narrator's father and Tom so revealing and significant?

Although this was a fairly popular question, it was very unevenly handled. Some candidates fully understood the father's hostility based on stereotyping, and the aggression he displays initially, and recognised the ways in which the Maori visitors confounded the father's stereotype by displaying greater politeness than he did. The significance of being 'the people before' was explored by some, and the contrasting relationships with the land of the Maoris and the colonists were sometimes discussed. However, there were often misreadings which suggested that the question was perhaps being answered as an unseen text seen for the first time; some thought Tom's father was the farmer, for example, and that this was a father-son conversation.

Question 22

How does Townsend Warner create such a memorable portrait of an animal in The Phoenix?

This question produced a good deal of narrative in response, with few candidates considering the way the Phoenix is portrayed, and fewer still explicitly considering memorability. Where interpretation was offered, it was often in terms of retributive justice, with limited awareness of the darkly humorous aspect of the story. Few candidates actually wrote about the physical appearance of the phoenix, although the question does invite that as at least a possible starting point. There were some attempts to ascribe a symbolic quality to the animal, though they were relatively few.

LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

Paper 0486/21
Paper 21 Drama

Key messages

- The most successful candidates were aware of the conventions of the Drama genre, understood that the texts are scripts for performance, referred to the audience and exhibited a personal response.
- Candidates needed to pay explicit attention to the wording of the question and to concentrate on how authors achieve their effects.
- The most useful opening paragraphs were brief, focused clearly on the specific question and avoided generalities, lengthy historical detail or elaborate context setting. Conclusions need to be more than a reiteration.
- A high level of achievement can only be gained by a detailed response to the author's dramatic and linguistic effects coupled with attention to what characters say, think, feel and do.
- Referring closely to the text, most effectively in the form of quotation, is the key to high achievement.
- For this paper candidates need to answer one passage-based question and one discursive question on two different texts. Candidates should not use the passage in the passage-based question to answer the discursive question.

General comments

Candidates had clearly benefitted from thorough and sensitive teaching, and several answers communicated remarkable knowledge, individuality, engagement and enjoyment.

On this paper a large number of candidates writing about *Inherit The Wind* and *Henry V* answered the discursive question purely with reference to the passage printed for the previous question. Candidates must be made aware that these questions are not linked. Many underachieved by approaching the paper in this way.

In answers to passage-based questions, strong candidates briefly established the context with selection of apt material. The key to success was to explore the passage in detail, quote from it extensively and comment on the content of the dialogue, the language used, the stagecraft, the dramatic effectiveness and the impact on the audience. Less successful responses barely quoted from the passage or wrote about stage directions, punctuation and imagery without any comment on what was actually happening in the scene.

Too many responses this session used labels such as capitalist/socialist, protagonist/antagonist, American Dream, and social responsibility, as if merely mentioning these terms was sufficient to answer the question. The terms were often misused or misapplied, detracting from the quality of the answer.

There were many very effective answers which explored effects such as dramatic effectiveness, intensity of emotion, use of conflict, humour, dramatic irony, foreshadowing, contrast and variety of tone with personal engagement, skill and maturity.

In answer to the discursive questions, the strongest answers selected the most apt material. Such answers ranged across the text, and included support for ideas in the form of quotation. They did not lose sight of the text as drama, and considered both the structure of the play and audience response to key scenes.

Some candidates would have benefitted from greater familiarity with the ideas of 'an effective opening' and 'entertaining', though most coped well with looking at 'significance'.

There were instances of candidates writing about the wrong character. Several wrote about Larry Keller instead of Steve Deever in answer to **Question 2**, and some mistook Mr Birling for Mrs Birling in **Question 4**. This was a more understandable error but shows the need to read the question carefully.

There were many effective attempts this session to discuss the reaction and sensibilities of a contemporary versus modern audience, but the candidate's own reaction and response is the one most desired. Whereas good teaching will include the cultural and historical backgrounds of texts, candidates need to assimilate and internalise this knowledge, rather than simply display it, often at such length that they do not finish their essay and therefore underachieve. There was some misunderstanding of the cultural issues in *An Inspector Calls* which will be outlined below.

Most candidates used their time well, but there were many brief and some blank answers. A significant number of candidates mixed up the names of the characters, particularly in response to *All My Sons* where Joe/Jim, Kate/Ann, Larry/Steve were confused. There were a significant number of rubric infringements on this paper with candidates either answering two passage-based, two discursive answers or two answers on the same text. Where this is the case, candidates can only be awarded the higher of the two marks given for the essays.

Comments on specific questions

ARTHUR MILLER: *All My Sons*

Question 1

The best answers understood the context – Chris learning of Joe's crime and storming out – and commented on what made the passage dramatically effective as an opening to the final Act of the play. Kate's 'rocking ceaselessly' and short answers were commented on, reflecting her nervous state of mind as did the time of night and setting. The strongest answers explored the 'moon...bluish light' and made interesting comments, some seeing it as a sign of hope and clarifying of ideas, others seeing the moon as ominous and a sign of problems to come. Whatever was argued, only the strongest responses linked this to an effective opening. The insight into Jim and his caring attitude, 'gently' speaking and trying to divert Kate's thoughts by speaking of his call-out was explored. Some argued that this is where we really find out a bit about Jim – his hopes and dream – and that there was criticism of Keller and others for whom 'Money' was the only important thing in life. This was seen as a direct reference to what Keller had done, and the extent of his greed. The 'argument' Kate is reluctant to discuss was noted in effective answers. The knowledge that Jim and the other neighbours knew of Keller's guilt was a feature of the best responses but ignored by the majority, despite being a key moment in the play. Kate's self-deception, thinking Chris knew, was rarely explored, but most commented on Jim's supporting ideas that Chris would return, a changed man as 'his star of ...honesty' spent. The final line summarising Jim's argument: 'Chris is a good son – he'll come back' was explored by only the highest achieving candidates. Less successful candidates only wrote about the very first part of the scene misinterpreting 'opening', confused the characters (thinking Jim was Joe), or showed no knowledge of the context. Few candidates were confident enough in their knowledge of the play to comment on the contrast between this scene and the end of Act Two.

Question 2

Strong responses showed how, though he never appears on stage Steve Deever, was always 'present' in discussions and a driving force to the plot, with Ann's possible marriage to Chris bringing him back into their lives and with it the possibility of Joe's lies and guilt being revealed. Keller's offer of a job and his vehement response to what Steve had supposedly done (causing Joe to be dragged through the courts) was seen as typical of Keller's despicable behaviour and attitude in general. Less detailed and secure responses were largely narrative, retelling the plot. It was rare to see George's dramatic and pivotal phone call from the prison and the visit to the Kellers included in an answer. The least successful answers were brief accounts of Steve's role in the play without any exploration of the play itself, such as the impact of George's visit. Some candidates mistook Steve for Larry Keller. Larry does not appear in the play it is true, but such a response indicates insecurity of knowledge.

J. B. PRIESTLEY: *An Inspector Calls*

Question 3

There was an emphasis on socio-political background here with too much detail, at times, on class and gender issues. Only the highest achieving answers incorporated this information to demonstrate understanding of Mr Birling's awareness of his lower social standing compared to Lady Croft. The Birlings are upper middle class, not upper class or aristocracy, and Birling has risen from the working class. Lady Croft is landed gentry, not a poor country girl. Unsurprisingly these vagaries of the British class system were widely misunderstood.

There was, however, much that was 'revealing' in this passage for candidates to explore. Birling's interest in cigars and port was understood to reveal his class aspirations and desire to impress Gerald. The perceived snub of Lady Croft not attending the dinner and thinking that Gerald 'might have done better socially' was seen by many, though few understood why this caused Gerald embarrassment. Birling's boasting about his possible inclusion on the Honours List featured in most responses. The proviso about avoiding scandal for the knighthood was explored as foreshadowing future events, with the most successful candidates bringing in the play's title as evidence this was going to be a main feature of the play. Some argued that Birling had a closer relationship with Gerald than Eric, as he excludes Eric from the conversation and abruptly answers his attempt to be included with a stark 'No.' This was also supported by his ignorance of Eric's drinking by offering him 'another glass of port'. Most candidates explored what was revealed about Eric and his drinking, and faux pas in almost revealing something of his knowledge of women and clothes in relation to Eva/Daisy. The stage directions, '*eagerly*', '*confused*' and '*he checks himself*' received much attention. The best responses linked the clothes to Sheila getting the girl dismissed.

There was, however, some confusion in less successful answers. Many argued that women were inferior, could only think about clothes and that the men, especially Mr Birling were sexist. Furthermore, Gerald's comment 'a bit fishy' was seen to reveal he knew more about Eric's problems and relationship with Eva/Daisy than he possibly did.

Question 4

The strongest answers showed understanding of Mrs Birling's snobbery and her attempts to belittle the Inspector. Such answers used the scene where the Inspector 'traps' Mrs Birling into giving a detailed account of who is to blame, and how 'the chief culprit' should be made to 'confess in public'. The change in attitude once the 'culprit' was understood to be Eric was made clear. The drama of this scene featured highly in the best responses, with understanding of key stage directions to inform of both the Inspector's and Mrs Birling's conflicting views on her role. The cliff hanger at the end, before Eric's return to the house, and dramatic tension created, as well as the Birlings' disbelief and abject horror at the unfolding of events, were noted in many responses.

Too often simplistic approaches to class and Priestley's 'message' were given – the Inspector representing the working class, and Mrs Birling the capitalists in society. The differences in attitude of the younger and older generation were mentioned and relevant comments on Sheila's attempts to stop her mother from condemning Eric made. 'Conflict' and 'striking' were often ignored by weaker responses which tended to narrate events and the part played by Mrs Birling in the play, ignoring the Inspector totally. Surprisingly, some responses only briefly touched on the details of her committee work and her treatment of and refusal to help Eva, focusing simply on some of the stage directions. There were some gleeful responses with satisfaction at this awful woman getting her come-uppance.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *The Merchant of Venice*

Question 5

Most candidates rightly noted the context here – the scene introduces us to Portia and follows on from Bassanio's securing of funds to go to Belmont. There was much rather heavy-handed criticism of Portia who was not the 'fair' Portia Bassanio had described, as she was racist (inappropriately as the suitors here are all the same race) and unkind. The use of national stereotypes was grasped only by the most successful candidates, who understood completely all suitors' nationalities and perceived characteristics. Many failed to understand 'dumb-show' as the effect of the language barrier, and the reference to 'sponge' was often not grasped. There was some interesting exploration of the relationship between the Englishman, Scottish Lord and the Frenchman, with understanding of how this would have entertained Shakespeare's Elizabethan audience. The question and answer format and the close friendship in so openly speaking to her maid,

Nerissa (considered very strange for such a rich heiress) were noted, and the comments on Bassanio where Portia 'pretends' not to remember him considered entertaining. The highest achieving candidates understood that the description of Bassanio as 'a Venetian, a scholar and a soldier' was the highest accolade possible during the Elizabethan era so he was clearly the man for Portia, and in stark contrast to the other suitors to whom she granted 'a fair departure'. Portia's intelligence received attention in her knowledge of Sibylla and Diana (though few understood the humour here) and many commented on the amusing lengths Portia would go to not to married to any of these suitors. Less successful answers showed limited understanding of the humour, paraphrased the passage or only responded implicitly rather than explicitly to the question.

Question 6

Successful answers showed understanding of the plot and thematic significance of this close, if somewhat, one-sided friendship. Often responses focused on the possible homosexual aspect of their friendship, with only the best stating that this is perhaps a modern-day interpretation. The danger is that by following this line of argument candidates stray from both the question and text with unsupported assertions and speculation. Antonio's kindness and willingness to accept the bond, potentially sacrificing his life for Bassanio, was seen as significant as it drives the main plot – without this, there would be no need of Shylock or the ensuing trial. Bassanio's financial exploitation was understood, but excused by the speed with which he left Portia to be at Antonio's side at the trial. The close bonds of friendship were seen in Antonio's words to Bassanio, absolving him of any blame for his predicament and by Bassanio's willingness to give up the ring, and indeed, to sacrifice his own dear wife for Antonio. Less confident responses tended to list examples of their relationship without comment or context.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Henry V*

Question 7

This question was answered well when candidates understood why the Dauphin had sent the tennis balls to Henry, and could comment on the power of his response. Only the strongest responses could explore the extended tennis match metaphor. Most could see Henry's intentions to 'dazzle all the eyes of France', but there were misunderstandings of 'keep my state' as meaning to hold on to France. Many commented on the violence in the speech but omitted to mention the insult that had provoked this violence, or reflect on its propaganda purposes. Only the most successful candidates could stand back and assess what the speech showed about Henry's characteristics as a King, rather than concentrating solely on what he said.

Question 8

The candidates who answered this question tended to use the passage in the previous question. Although the passage does provide material for both sides of the argument, clearly limiting oneself to one speech from early in the play is self-penalising.

J. LAWRENCE AND R. E. LEE: *Inherit The Wind*

Question 9

Strong answers here commented on Hillsboro's dramatic display of religious fundamentalism and the effectiveness of the singing, the actions and the rising crescendo of responses to Reverend Brown's words, and their hell-fire imagery and diction. Such responses showed understanding of the context of the passage and the powerful moment when the Reverend curses his own child, causing a dramatic reaction both from Rachel herself and from Brady, who effectively calms the situation. The change of tone to the more wistful and melancholy exchange between Brady and Drummond was noted, along with its significance to the play as a whole. The most successful answers understood the significance of the scene in marking the moment where Brown's power (and therefore the fundamentalist viewpoint) begins to lose its hold on the people of the town. Less successful answers thought the scene took place in the courtroom, and omitted Rachel and the mention of Bert altogether. They also confused Brown and Brady and their respective roles and responses, and thought Drummond was being introduced to the play for the first time. Some candidates showed no evidence of having read the play.

Question 10

Very few candidates answered this question – on a major character in the play – by referring to the play as a whole. Most mistakenly only used the very limited reference to Drummond in the passage in **Question 9**. Whilst they found interesting and accurate things to say about the passage, these responses were necessarily self-limiting.

LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

Paper 0486/22
Paper 22 Drama

Key messages

- The most successful candidates were aware of the conventions of the Drama genre, understood that the texts are scripts for performance, and exhibited a personal response to them.
- Candidates needed to pay explicit attention to the wording of the question and to concentrate on how authors achieve their effects.
- The most useful opening paragraphs were brief, focused clearly on the specific question and avoided generalities, lengthy historical detail or elaborate context setting. Conclusions need to be more than a reiteration.
- A high level of achievement can only be gained by a detailed response to the author's dramatic and linguistic effects coupled with attention to what characters say, think, feel and do.
- Referring closely to the text, most effectively in the form of quotation, is the key to high achievement.
- Merely identifying literary terms or themes is an inadequate response to the tasks set.

General comments

Candidates had clearly benefitted from thorough and sensitive teaching and several answers communicated remarkable knowledge, individuality, engagement and enjoyment. Although this is not a requirement of the syllabus, it was encouraging to see candidates learning informed by having seen or viewed the plays in production.

In answers to passage-based questions, strong candidates briefly established the context with selection of apt material. The key to success was to explore the passage in detail, quote from it extensively and comment on the content of the dialogue, the language used, the stagecraft, the dramatic effectiveness and the impact on the audience. Less successful responses barely quoted from the passage or wrote about stage directions, punctuation and imagery without any comment on what was actually happening in the scene.

Too many responses this session used labels such as capitalist/socialist, protagonist/antagonist, American Dream, social responsibility, and anti-Semitism, as if merely mentioning these terms was sufficient to answer the question. The terms were often misused or misapplied, detracting from the quality of the answer.

There were many very effective answers which explored effects such as the creation of tension, intensity of emotion, use of conflict, humour, dramatic irony, foreshadowing, contrast and variety of tone with personal engagement, skill and maturity.

In answer to the discursive questions, the strongest answers selected the most apt material. Such answers ranged across the text, and included support for ideas in the form of quotation. They did not lose sight of the text as drama and considered both the structure of the play and audience response to key scenes. If the question asked for consideration of two moments, then two moments were distinguished successfully. Some candidates would have benefited from greater familiarity with the ideas of sympathy and many, surprisingly, with suspense, equating it with tension or selecting inappropriate moments in the play.

Candidates who heeded the wording of the question, such as 'striking ways' or 'vividly' produced stronger, more focused responses.

There were many effective attempts this session to discuss the reaction and sensibilities of a contemporary versus modern audience, but the candidate's own reaction and response is the one most desired. Whereas good teaching will include the cultural and historical backgrounds of texts, candidates need to assimilate and internalise this knowledge, rather than simply display it, often at such length that they do not finish their essay and therefore underachieve.

Most candidates used their time well and there were few brief answers. There were fewer purely narrative responses this year, and fewer candidates who seemed determined to answer a question from a previous session. There were some rubric infringements on this paper, with candidates either answering two passage-based, two discursive answers or two answers on the same text. Where this is the case, candidates can only be awarded the higher of the two marks given for the essays.

Comments on specific questions

ARTHUR MILLER: *All My Sons*

Question 1

There were some outstanding answers to this question. The strongest focused sharply on the stagecraft building towards the revelation of Larry's letter. They considered Ann's repetitive insistence on Larry's death, Kate's moving away and then violent wrist-grasping and letter snatching, the dismissal of Joe, the delay in revealing the contents of the letter to the audience, Ann's reluctance and hesitation, and the impact of the "low moan". Many showed a keen and intelligent interest in the complex dramatic context (sometimes, unfortunately, at the expense of attention to the passage) noting that Miller has primed the audience's curiosity about the fate of Larry since the opening scene and that Ann has been carrying this agonising information throughout, and that the letter will lead directly to Joe's suicide. Only the most accomplished understood the awkwardness at the start of the passage and what the "it" is that Ann is "not going to do anything about" – and Joe's obvious relief at this. Less successful candidates were often uncertain about the context for the passage, sometimes placing it before George's arrival, or before the revelation of Joe's guilt to Chris and to Ann. Joe's presence in the scene was often ignored entirely and many insisted that it is Kate who tells him to go. Several candidates stated that Larry flew P40s and was therefore killed directly by Joe, or that Kate already knew he was dead. Some candidates were extremely critical of Ann, seeing her as a faithless and a ruthless betrayer of her father.

Question 2

The question of sympathy for Chris was often handled with great sensitivity and a variety of convincing arguments were advanced by successful candidates: the references to his idealism and essential niceness supplied by many of the other characters, his self-deprecating humour, the professional and personal sacrifices he has made to keep his parents happy, his traumatic wartime experiences and survivor's guilt, his diffident courtship, his devastation at the revelation of his father's guilt, his pain and guilt at the end of the play and the likelihood of continued suffering. Answers were often supported by well-chosen and wide ranging reference to the text. Some candidates challenged the terms of the question to an unhelpful extent with arguments about his "unsympathetic" qualities (self-delusion bordering on hypocrisy, weakness, compromise). Other less convincing answers concentrated on arguments about sibling rivalry with Larry, which the play scarcely supports. Others drifted into narratives demonstrating pain and suffering, but never fully addressed the idea of "sympathy".

J. B. PRIESTLEY: *An Inspector Calls*

Question 3

There were many highly competent answers to this question which worked through the five characters in turn and differentiated between their responses with well-selected support. The very best heeded the wording of the question and analysed how Priestley's writing vividly conveys the responses, not merely what the responses were. Such answers brought out the dramatic qualities of the conflicts and recriminations portrayed in the passage, often placing the anger, bitterness, guilt and confidence displayed by Sheila and Eric in the context of their earlier behaviour in the play. The generational contrast between honesty and self-awareness, and concealment and self-preservation, was often thoughtfully addressed. Less successful answers drifted into unexplored generalisations about capitalism and socialism, overstated Gerald's lack of concern and bracketed him unreservedly with the senior Birlings, and misconstrued Mrs Birling's passivity as guilt. Confident candidates identified the immediate context and the unmasking of the Inspector as a fraud at

the start of their answers, and often found it ironic that Mrs Birling's only contribution to the passage, after all that has transpired and her own appalling contribution to Eva's suffering, is to remonstrate with her husband about his language.

Question 4

"Suspense" proved to be a challenging concept for many candidates and was often loosely interpreted as "a moment of tension/conflict". The most accomplished answers tended to make shrewd and specific "moment" choices, most notably the Act-spanning delays before the confirmations of Gerald and Eric's involvement and the nervous tension generated by hearing only one side of the telephone conversations in Act Three. The gradual realisation of Eric's role in the tragedy by the audience, his sister and finally his mother, was often handled particularly well, with sensitive attention to the impact of the dramatic irony and serious implications for all those involved. Arguments about the building of suspense *before* the Inspector's arrival in Act One were less convincing, though the impact of the lighting changes which greet his entrance and of his intimidating presence and manner was often thoughtfully explored. It was difficult with some answers to tell which two "moments" were being selected – as the coverage was so wide-ranging and unspecific.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *The Merchant of Venice*

Question 5

High achieving candidates commented on the unusual nature of this scene in which minor characters are updating the audience on a series of dramatic offstage incidents, and explored Shakespeare's reasons for this choice. These answers questioned the reliability of two unapologetic anti-Semites mocking the anguish of Shylock in discovering that his daughter has run off with a Christian and with his valuables. Intelligent connections were often made between the dramatic losses and isolation experienced by both Shylock and his adversary, Antonio, and the dramatic contrast in the sympathies of Salerio and Solanio in portraying their respective situations. The most accomplished answers were sharply aware of the ominous implications for Antonio in the possible loss of his vessel, and the ways in which the concern of the two narrators and the reminder of the "Jew's bond" are priming the audience for future conflict and the courtroom scene. Close attention to the language depicting the pathos of Bassanio's parting from Antonio, and Shylock's comically exaggerated agitation, was often a feature of the best answers. Less confident candidates often displayed confusion about the order of events and about the various ships, gondolas and vessels cited in the passage, sometimes concentrating almost exclusively on Shylock and not commenting on the second half of the passage.

Question 6

Strong answers to this question ranged confidently and selectively across the text to demonstrate the malevolent intensity and obsessiveness of Shylock's revenge plot, and often contrasted this with the comic table-turning which Portia and Nerissa inflict on Bassanio and Gratiano in 'the ring plot'. Shylock's famous Act 3 Scene 1 speech outlining his grievances and justifying his vengeful intent was often thoughtfully explored, and his implacability in the courtroom scene set against the demands for mercy from Portia and others. Fewer answers, surprisingly, explored the striking nature of Shylock's revenge being turned against him so dramatically in this scene. Successful candidates were, however, prepared to weigh up the morality of the Christian "revenge" meted out to Shylock. Less confident candidates often drifted into narrative approaches, or insisted that Jessica and Launcelot were simply getting back at Shylock by deserting him.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Henry V*

Question 7

Successful candidates divided their attention between the two strands of the question. The best saw this as the most subdued of the Eastcheap scenes because of the death of Falstaff and the imminent departure of the three men and the boy to France, and some made the downbeat point that only Pistol will survive to the end of the play. Some found the innocent images which the Hostess ascribes to Falstaff at the moment of his death and the repetitive insistence on his stone-coldness moving, whereas others found the "christom child" images ironically amusing given Falstaff's lifestyle choices, and the Hostess's handling of the dead Knight bawdily comic. There was much thoughtful unpicking of her malapropisms and some references to the running joke of Bardolph's nose. The irony in Pistol's warnings to the Hostess given the criminal intent of his French trip was often pointed out, and the reasons behind Nym's sad inability to kiss the Hostess goodbye also noted. Less successful candidates tended to quote sections and to label them "amusing" or "moving", but found exploration of both the language and the context very difficult. Some clearly wanted to focus on

Henry's development rather than the set question, and saw the passage as merely portraying the youthful excesses he has now outgrown.

Question 8

There were some strikingly strong, detailed and wide-ranging answers to this question and, conversely, some very vague and generalised responses. The best answers to this question could anchor thoughtful reflections on the French to specific details. Candidates who explored the implications of the tennis ball gift, the contrast between the Dauphin and his father, the negligent defending of Harfleur, the vaingloriousness and triviality of the pre-battle conversation and the brutal slaying of the baggage boys tended to be the most successful. Some confident candidates also managed to refine and extend their argument by focusing on Katherine's liveliness and good humour, Montjoy's honourable conduct, and the King's restraint and common sense. Less successful candidates constructed arguments which focused more on Henry than the French, or wrote undeveloped arguments about the contrast with Henry's forces.

J. LAWRENCE AND R. E. LEE: *Inherit The Wind*

Question 9

There were some strong responses to Hornbeck's first appearance, and many picked up and made good use of the hints in the introductory stage directions such as: "sneers...contrast...impertinent...contempt...", to scrutinise his words and actions throughout the passage. His sarcasm was often thoughtfully explored and his jokes, largely at the expense of Hillsboro and its attitudes, explained. The most accomplished not only engaged closely with his language (particularly his description of Brady) but also with the stage action and the use of his straw hat, his response to the monkey, and his choice of the hot dog. Some candidates were totally immune to his humour and expressed rather overstated hostility to Hornbeck for this early stage of the play. Other candidates took the question as an opportunity to write about attitudes in Hillsboro, rather than about Hornbeck himself, and the striking introduction of a major character.

Question 10

Candidates tended to be confident exploring her early timidity, fear of her father, concern for Bert and unthinking acceptance of the community ethos. They were not always as sharply focused on the "change" moments and particularly her public defences of Bert in court and at the bible meeting, and, most importantly, her rebirth as a free thinker (with suitcase) in the final scene.

LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

Paper 0486/23
Paper 23 Drama

Key messages

- The most successful candidates were aware of the conventions of the Drama genre, understood that the texts are scripts for performance, and exhibited a personal response to them.
- Candidates needed to pay explicit attention to the wording of the question and to concentrate on how authors achieve their effects.
- The most useful opening paragraphs were brief, focussed clearly on the specific question and avoided generalities, lengthy historical detail or elaborate context setting. Conclusions need to be more than a reiteration.
- A high level of achievement can only be gained by a detailed response to the author's dramatic and linguistic effects coupled with attention to what characters say, think, feel and do.
- Referring closely to the text, most effectively in the form of quotation, is the key to high achievement.
- Merely identifying literary terms or themes is an inadequate response to the tasks set.

General comments

Candidates had clearly benefitted from thorough and sensitive teaching and several answers communicated remarkable knowledge, individuality, engagement and enjoyment. It was encouraging to see candidates' learning informed by having seen or viewed the plays in production.

In answers to passage-based questions, strong candidates briefly established the context with selection of apt material. The key to success was to explore the passage in detail, quote from it extensively and comment on the content of the dialogue, the language used, the stagecraft, the dramatic effectiveness and the impact on the audience. Less successful responses barely quoted from the passage or wrote about stage directions, punctuation and imagery without any comment on what was actually happening in the scene.

Too many responses this session used labels such as capitalist/socialist, protagonist/antagonist, American Dream, social responsibility, and anti-Semitism, as if merely mentioning these terms was sufficient to answer the question. The terms were often misused or misapplied, detracting from the quality of the answer.

There were many very effective answers which explored effects such as the creation of tension, intensity of emotion, use of conflict, humour, dramatic irony, foreshadowing, contrast and variety of tone with personal engagement, skill and maturity.

In answer to the discursive questions, the strongest answers selected the most apt material. Such answers ranged across the text, and included support for ideas in the form of quotation. They did not lose sight of the text as drama, and considered both the structure of the play and audience response to key scenes.

Candidates who heeded the wording of the question, such as 'strikingly' and 'significant', produced stronger, more focussed responses.

There were many effective attempts this session to discuss the reaction and sensibilities of a contemporary versus modern audience, but the candidate's own reaction and response is the one most desired. Whereas good teaching will include the cultural and historical backgrounds of texts, candidates need to assimilate and

internalise this knowledge, rather than display it, often at such length that they do not finish their essay and therefore underachieve.

Most candidates used their time well and there were few brief answers. There were fewer purely narrative responses this year, and fewer candidates who seemed determined to answer a question from a previous session. There were very few rubric infringements on this paper.

Comments on specific questions

ARTHUR MILLER: *All My Sons*

Question 1

This was a popular choice. To answer this question fully, candidates needed to move beyond what the feelings of the character are, to consider how they are strikingly conveyed through stage directions, tone and language. Many candidates identified that Kate is angry at the start of the passage because she thinks the family want to accept Larry's death. Stronger candidates went on to explore how her tone is conveyed in the stage directions and italicised words. Many candidates thought it was striking that Kate refused to accept Larry's death after three-and-a-half years and wanted to avoid Chris's repeated requests to forget Larry. Stronger answers considered how this is conveyed: by Kate dramatically pressing the top of her head and asking for an aspirin to try to change the conversation. Perceptive responses developed an analysis of this to suggest that Kate's repeated headaches are the result of the emotional and mental effort it takes her to maintain her belief that Larry is not dead. Most candidates noted the striking change of tone as Kate's '*smile vanishes*', and she conveys her suspicions to Joe about Chris and Ann's marriage. Her conversation with Joe was often explored in detail: many candidates commented on Kate's striking manner of simply stating what she wishes to be true, in this case: '*He's not going to marry her.*' The best candidates moved on from Kate to consider the thoughts and feelings of Chris and Joe; suggesting that Chris cared for Kate, but that he wanted her to acknowledge Larry's death so that he could get on with his life and marry Ann. They considered this was strikingly conveyed in Chris's first speech and noted its emotional intensity as she looks into his face, and he pleads with her to forget Larry. The repeated '*Mother*', hesitant phrasing shown by the ellipsis and dash, and the gentle questions were all taken as evidence of his love and concern for her. Chris's use of the train metaphor was often explained in simple terms, such as that the train represented Larry, rather than explored, as in the frustration Chris feels is strikingly conveyed in the passivity of the passengers and their lack of action and control of the situation, as they wait in limbo for something which is never going to arrive. Candidates didn't find as much to say about Joe, but most pointed out that Keller's challenge to Kate's delusion is very weak in his "*So what?*" and "*Now listen, kid...*" because he doesn't want to upset her. Useful stage directions have him "*sharply watching her reaction*" and he tries to jolly her along.

Question 2

This was also a popular choice, and candidates took different approaches to this question. The best answers tracked the theme of deception through the whole play and across a range of characters. Some focused on one main character and explored his or her self-deception in great detail, while others considered Kate, Chris and Joe, and dealt more briefly with each of them. To answer this question fully, candidates needed to do more than identify the character's self-deception; they also needed to consider its significance in the play. Most candidates dealt with Joe and his self-deception about his responsibility for the deaths of the 21 air crew, as well as Larry, and his treatment of Steve Deever. Stronger candidates considered his motives for maintaining his deception: that he needed to build up his business to provide financially for his wife and family. A few perceptive candidates thought he was deceiving himself over his motives, too, because it can't be right to value the success of a business above the lives of young men – including one of your own sons. Some candidates pointed out that the significance of this is so central to the play that it is held in its title; and that by the end of the play, Joe has realised that the dead men were "All My Sons", prompting him to atone for his guilt with his suicide. Most candidates identified Kate's self-deception as being about Larry's death, which affects her ability to accept Chris and Ann's relationship: if she were to accept Larry's death, she says she would also have to accept that Joe killed him, which would lead to his criminal act about the cracked cylinders being acknowledged. Candidates who considered Chris's self-deception – about his father's guilt – also explored his experiences during the war, when he witnessed men sacrificing their own lives so that others might live. Some candidates did not consider the significance of the self-deception at all, thus limiting their answers.

J. B. PRIESTLEY: *An Inspector Calls*

Question 3

This was a popular choice of text and question. Candidates generally found plenty of material for comment in the passage: the strongest answers remained firmly focused on the passage itself, and the question which directs candidates to explore the writing. The most successful answers often selected some of the following: Mrs Birling's severe condemnation of her own son, and the manner in which she does this; the dramatic irony of her being the only one not aware of this, heightened by Sheila's increasingly desperate attempts to stop her; Sheila's crying; the Inspector's methods of setting the trap for Mrs Birling; his control of the whole scene, down to looking at his watch; the extreme emotion of all the Birlings as they realise the truth; and the orchestrated climax of the last three lines. Some approached their answer by commenting on the dramatic contrast between Mrs Birling, Sheila, and the Inspector. Perceptive answers showed understanding both of the writer at work here, and the response of the audience. The tone of the characters, for example Mrs Birling's striking, formal and harsh sentencing of the young man, as she numbers her points and leaves no room for doubt (*'he'd be entirely responsible'*, as she speaks *'triumphantly'*) were explored. The highest achieving candidates commented on the striking staging of the last three lines, such as the heightened tension of the silence on stage and auditorium, created as the Inspector holds up his hand; the increased anticipation as the front door is heard, and all characters on stage look towards the door to focus the audience on the person entering; Eric's entrance and his *'pale and distressed'* appearance seeming to confirm his transgressions; but also Priestley's dramatic stopping of the scene at that climax before the interrogation of Eric can begin. Less confident candidates wrote a list of the stage directions and punctuation used and asserted they were striking, without consideration of the character speaking and the context, and with little understanding of the piece as drama.

Question 4

Most candidates used detailed material from the start of the play to comment on the engagement. Most thought it was memorable that Mr Birling was so keen on the marriage because it united his business interests with Gerald's family, but it is over-stating matters to claim that the marriage was actually arranged by Sheila's parents. Many candidates explored the effects of Gerald's affair with Daisy, and thought Sheila was right to break off the engagement. Stronger answers went on to consider Sheila's role: she learns to assume responsibility for Eva's suicide during the play, and so she is a changed person by the end, whereas Gerald does not consider he is to blame, especially after he discovers that the Inspector is fake and apparently no-one outside will know of his affair. There was some exploration of the language used by Sheila at moments of distress. Perceptive candidates often explored how Priestley uses the relationship to comment on particular themes: social class, the role of women, social responsibility, social morality, money, or ideas of romantic love. Some candidates needed to move beyond a recounting of the engagement and the events leading to its being broken, to consider what was memorable about how Priestley depicts it. Candidates needed to select appropriate material from throughout the play to support their answer.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *The Merchant of Venice*

Question 5

Candidates who gave a brief context for this scene had a clearer overview of Shylock's motives and attitudes during this passage. Shylock's lengthy opening speech listing his suffering at the hands of Antonio was very well commented on by most candidates, who were often able to select specific words and phrases and comment on their effects. Popular ones were: *'misbeliever'*, which gave candidates the opportunity to point out that Shylock was abused because of his faith; and *'cut-throat dog'*, which candidates thought debased Shylock to the lowly, unclean level of *'dog'* and stripped him of his humanity. Most candidates unsurprisingly felt sympathy for Shylock at this stage in the passage, and during Antonio's response. Some candidates maintained their sympathy during Shylock's next speech, taking his stated desire to be friends, his *'kindness'*, and his offer to lend money without interest at face value. Candidates who had a better overview of the passage judged Shylock to be cleverly baiting a trap for Antonio here. Some candidates seemed to stop before reaching Shylock's last speech, which meant that they missed a key point: his setting the bond of the pound of flesh. Stronger answers commented that this horrific bond clearly shows Shylock's hate of Antonio and his murderous desire for revenge, and they varied in their personal response to him, with most disliking Shylock for his treachery and thinking he has now gone too far. Some thought he was justified in his revenge after the constant abuse received from Antonio; others quoted *'pleaseth'* to show that they felt

disgusted by Shylock enjoying the thought of Antonio's painful death. The question encourages a personal response; some candidates simply needed to say what they felt, rather than spending too long listing the differences between an Elizabethan audience's response and that of a modern-day audience, instead of focusing on the writing of the passage.

Question 6

There were many answers to this question too. Candidates were split down the middle as to whether they were persuaded that the marriage would be happy or not, with most taking a balanced approach before deciding. Some felt that they never really knew each other very well before getting married, and that Bassanio's getting into debt would make them unhappy. There seems little doubt that Bassanio was attracted to Portia by her wealth and looks; but there is mutual attraction there too. Candidates decided how far Portia's hints to Bassanio as to which casket to choose were actual cheating, or rather an intelligent way to follow her late father's will and still get her own way too. Bassanio's friendship with Antonio was often seen as too close to allow the marriage to be happy; but Portia's willingness to help Antonio for Bassanio's sake, and her ability to do so, was often viewed as evidence of her love for Bassanio. The ring was sometimes seen as a betrayal by Bassanio, and as a sign of a future of betrayals and an unhappy marriage; but others dismissed this as unimportant, since Portia forgives Bassanio. Whatever conclusion candidates reached, they needed to select appropriate material from throughout the play in support of their case. It was evident from their engagement with the task that candidates often enjoyed answering this question.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: Henry V

Question 7

There were very few responses to this question. Candidates had a good overview of the context and highlighted the despair of the French, their denigration of the English and their urgency to fight back. The comedic aspects of the French exclamations were largely ignored, as were the exaggerated descriptions of English weather and the English themselves. Responses were generally narrative in approach, with very little comment on the language or the passage as a piece of drama.

Question 8

Too few answers were submitted to make comment appropriate.

J. LAWRENCE & R. E. LEE: Inherit the Wind

Question 9

Too few answers were submitted to make comment appropriate.

Question 10

Too few answers were submitted to make comment appropriate.

LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

Paper 0486/31
Paper 31 Drama (Open Text)

Key messages

- The most successful candidates were aware of the conventions of the Drama genre, understood that the texts are scripts for performance, referred to the audience and exhibited a personal response.
- Candidates needed to pay explicit attention to the wording of the question and to concentrate on how authors achieve their effects.
- The most useful opening paragraphs were brief, focused clearly on the specific question and avoided generalities, lengthy historical detail or elaborate context setting. Conclusions need to be more than a reiteration.
- A high level of achievement can only be gained by a detailed response to the author's dramatic and linguistic effects coupled with attention to what characters say, think, feel and do.
- Referring closely to the text, most effectively in the form of quotation, is the key to high achievement.
- For this paper candidates need to answer one passage-based question or one discursive question. Candidates should not use the passage in the passage-based question to answer the discursive question.

General comments

Candidates had clearly benefitted from thorough and sensitive teaching, and several answers communicated remarkable knowledge, individuality, engagement and enjoyment.

On this paper a large number of candidates writing about *Inherit The Wind* and *Henry V* answered the discursive question purely with reference to the passage printed for the previous question. Candidates must be made aware that these questions are not linked. Many underachieved by approaching the paper in this way.

In answers to passage-based questions, strong candidates briefly established the context with selection of apt material. The key to success was to explore the passage in detail, quote from it extensively and comment on the content of the dialogue, the language used, the stagecraft, the dramatic effectiveness and the impact on the audience. Less successful responses barely quoted from the passage or wrote about stage directions, punctuation and imagery without any comment on what was actually happening in the scene.

Too many responses this session used labels such as capitalist/socialist, protagonist/antagonist, American Dream, and social responsibility, as if merely mentioning these terms was sufficient to answer the question. The terms were often misused or misapplied, detracting from the quality of the answer.

There were many very effective answers which explored effects such as dramatic effectiveness, intensity of emotion, use of conflict, humour, dramatic irony, foreshadowing, contrast and variety of tone with personal engagement, skill and maturity.

In answer to the discursive questions, the strongest answers selected the most apt material. Such answers ranged across the text, and included support for ideas in the form of quotation. They did not lose sight of the text as drama, and considered both the structure of the play and audience response to key scenes.

Some candidates would have benefitted from greater familiarity with the ideas of 'an effective opening' and 'entertaining', though most coped well with looking at 'significance'.

There were instances of candidates writing about the wrong character. Several wrote about Larry Keller instead of Steve Deever in answer to **Question 2**, and some mistook Mr Birling for Mrs Birling in **Question 4**. This was a more understandable error but shows the need to read the question carefully.

There were many effective attempts this session to discuss the reaction and sensibilities of a contemporary versus modern audience, but the candidate's own reaction and response is the one most desired. Whereas good teaching will include the cultural and historical backgrounds of texts, candidates need to assimilate and internalise this knowledge, rather than simply display it, often at such length that they do not finish their essay and therefore underachieve. There was some misunderstanding of the cultural issues in *An Inspector Calls* which will be outlined below.

Most candidates used their time well, but there were many brief and some blank answers. A significant number of candidates mixed up the names of the characters, particularly in response to *All My Sons* where Joe/Jim, Kate/Ann, Larry/Steve were confused

Comments on specific questions

ARTHUR MILLER: *All My Sons*

Question 1

The best answers understood the context – Chris learning of Joe's crime and storming out – and commented on what made the passage dramatically effective as an opening to the final Act of the play. Kate's 'rocking ceaselessly' and short answers were commented on, reflecting her nervous state of mind as did the time of night and setting. The strongest answers explored the 'moon...bluish light' and made interesting comments, some seeing it as a sign of hope and clarifying of ideas, others seeing the moon as ominous and a sign of problems to come. Whatever was argued, only the strongest responses linked this to an effective opening. The insight into Jim and his caring attitude, 'gently' speaking and trying to divert Kate's thoughts by speaking of his call-out was explored. Some argued that this is where we really find out a bit about Jim – his hopes and dream – and that there was criticism of Keller and others for whom 'Money' was the only important thing in life. This was seen as a direct reference to what Keller had done, and the extent of his greed. The 'argument' Kate is reluctant to discuss was noted in effective answers. The knowledge that Jim and the other neighbours knew of Keller's guilt was a feature of the best responses but ignored by the majority, despite being a key moment in the play. Kate's self-deception, thinking Chris knew, was rarely explored, but most commented on Jim's supporting ideas that Chris would return, a changed man as 'his star of ...honesty' spent. The final line summarising Jim's argument: 'Chris is a good son – he'll come back' was explored by only the highest achieving candidates. Less successful candidates only wrote about the very first part of the scene misinterpreting 'opening', confused the characters (thinking Jim was Joe), or showed no knowledge of the context. Few candidates were confident enough in their knowledge of the play to comment on the contrast between this scene and the end of Act Two.

Question 2

Strong responses showed how, though he never appears on stage Steve Deever, was always 'present' in discussions and a driving force to the plot, with Ann's possible marriage to Chris bringing him back into their lives and with it the possibility of Joe's lies and guilt being revealed. Keller's offer of a job and his vehement response to what Steve had supposedly done (causing Joe to be dragged through the courts) was seen as typical of Keller's despicable behaviour and attitude in general. Less detailed and secure responses were largely narrative, retelling the plot. It was rare to see George's dramatic and pivotal phone call from the prison and the visit to the Kellers included in an answer. The least successful answers were brief accounts of Steve's role in the play without any exploration of the play itself, such as the impact of George's visit. Some candidates mistook Steve for Larry Keller. Larry does not appear in the play it is true, but such a response indicates insecurity of knowledge.

J. B. PRIESTLEY: *An Inspector Calls*

Question 3

There was an emphasis on socio-political background here with too much detail, at times, on class and gender issues. Only the highest achieving answers incorporated this information to demonstrate

understanding of Mr Birling's awareness of his lower social standing compared to Lady Croft. The Birlings are upper middle class, not upper class or aristocracy, and Birling has risen from the working class. Lady Croft is landed gentry, not a poor country girl. Unsurprisingly these vagaries of the British class system were widely misunderstood.

There was, however, much that was 'revealing' in this passage for candidates to explore. Birling's interest in cigars and port was understood to reveal his class aspirations and desire to impress Gerald. The perceived snub of Lady Croft not attending the dinner and thinking that Gerald 'might have done better socially' was seen by many, though few understood why this caused Gerald embarrassment. Birling's boasting about his possible inclusion on the Honours List featured in most responses. The proviso about avoiding scandal for the knighthood was explored as foreshadowing future events, with the most successful candidates bringing in the play's title as evidence this was going to be a main feature of the play. Some argued that Birling had a closer relationship with Gerald than Eric, as he excludes Eric from the conversation and abruptly answers his attempt to be included with a stark 'No.' This was also supported by his ignorance of Eric's drinking by offering him 'another glass of port'. Most candidates explored what was revealed about Eric and his drinking, and faux pas in almost revealing something of his knowledge of women and clothes in relation to Eva/Daisy. The stage directions, 'eagerly', 'confused' and 'he checks himself' received much attention. The best responses linked the clothes to Sheila getting the girl dismissed.

There was, however, some confusion in less successful answers. Many argued that women were inferior, could only think about clothes and that the men, especially Mr Birling were sexist. Furthermore, Gerald's comment 'a bit fishy' was seen to reveal he knew more about Eric's problems and relationship with Eva/Daisy than he possibly did.

Question 4

The strongest answers showed understanding of Mrs Birling's snobbery and her attempts to belittle the Inspector. Such answers used the scene where the Inspector 'traps' Mrs Birling into giving a detailed account of who is to blame, and how 'the chief culprit' should be made to 'confess in public'. The change in attitude once the 'culprit' was understood to be Eric was made clear. The drama of this scene featured highly in the best responses, with understanding of key stage directions to inform of both the Inspector's and Mrs Birling's conflicting views on her role. The cliff hanger at the end, before Eric's return to the house, and dramatic tension created, as well as the Birlings' disbelief and abject horror at the unfolding of events, were noted in many responses.

Too often simplistic approaches to class and Priestley's 'message' were given – the Inspector representing the working class, and Mrs Birling the capitalists in society. The differences in attitude of the younger and older generation were mentioned and relevant comments on Sheila's attempts to stop her mother from condemning Eric made. 'Conflict' and 'striking' were often ignored by weaker responses which tended to narrate events and the part played by Mrs Birling in the play, ignoring the Inspector totally. Surprisingly, some responses only briefly touched on the details of her committee work and her treatment of and refusal to help Eva, focusing simply on some of the stage directions. There were some gleeful responses with satisfaction at this awful woman getting her come-uppance.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *The Merchant of Venice*

Question 5

Most candidates rightly noted the context here – the scene introduces us to Portia and follows on from Bassanio's securing of funds to go to Belmont. There was much rather heavy-handed criticism of Portia who was not the 'fair' Portia Bassanio had described, as she was racist (inappropriately as the suitors here are all the same race) and unkind. The use of national stereotypes was grasped only by the most successful candidates, who understood completely all suitors' nationalities and perceived characteristics. Many failed to understand 'dumb-show' as the effect of the language barrier, and the reference to 'sponge' was often not grasped. There was some interesting exploration of the relationship between the Englishman, Scottish Lord and the Frenchman, with understanding of how this would have entertained Shakespeare's Elizabethan audience. The question and answer format and the close friendship in so openly speaking to her maid, Nerissa (considered very strange for such a rich heiress) were noted, and the comments on Bassanio where Portia 'pretends' not to remember him considered entertaining. The highest achieving candidates understood that the description of Bassanio as 'a Venetian, a scholar and a soldier' was the highest accolade possible during the Elizabethan era so he was clearly the man for Portia, and in stark contrast to the other suitors to whom she granted 'a fair departure'. Portia's intelligence received attention in her knowledge of Sibylla and Diana (though few understood the humour here) and many commented on the amusing lengths Portia would

go to not to married to any of these suitors. Less successful answers showed limited understanding of the humour, paraphrased the passage or only responded implicitly rather than explicitly to the question.

Question 6

Successful answers showed understanding of the plot and thematic significance of this close, if somewhat, one-sided friendship. Often responses focused on the possible homosexual aspect of their friendship, with only the best stating that this is perhaps a modern-day interpretation. The danger is that by following this line of argument candidates stray from both the question and text with unsupported assertions and speculation. Antonio's kindness and willingness to accept the bond, potentially sacrificing his life for Bassanio, was seen as significant as it drives the main plot – without this, there would be no need of Shylock or the ensuing trial. Bassanio's financial exploitation was understood, but excused by the speed with which he left Portia to be at Antonio's side at the trial. The close bonds of friendship were seen in Antonio's words to Bassanio, absolving him of any blame for his predicament and by Bassanio's willingness to give up the ring, and indeed, to sacrifice his own dear wife for Antonio. Less confident responses tended to list examples of their relationship without comment or context.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Henry V*

Question 7

This question was answered well when candidates understood why the Dauphin had sent the tennis balls to Henry, and could comment on the power of his response. Only the strongest responses could explore the extended tennis match metaphor. Most could see Henry's intentions to 'dazzle all the eyes of France', but there were misunderstandings of 'keep my state' as meaning to hold on to France. Many commented on the violence in the speech but omitted to mention the insult that had provoked this violence, or reflect on its propaganda purposes. Only the most successful candidates could stand back and assess what the speech showed about Henry's characteristics as a King, rather than concentrating solely on what he said.

Question 8

The candidates who answered this question tended to use the passage in the previous question. Although the passage does provide material for both sides of the argument, clearly limiting oneself to one speech from early in the play is self-penalising.

J. LAWRENCE AND R. E. LEE: *Inherit The Wind*

Question 9

Strong answers here commented on Hillsboro's dramatic display of religious fundamentalism and the effectiveness of the singing, the actions and the rising crescendo of responses to Reverend Brown's words, and their hell-fire imagery and diction. Such responses showed understanding of the context of the passage and the powerful moment when the Reverend curses his own child, causing a dramatic reaction both from Rachel herself and from Brady, who effectively calms the situation. The change of tone to the more wistful and melancholy exchange between Brady and Drummond was noted, along with its significance to the play as a whole. The most successful answers understood the significance of the scene in marking the moment where Brown's power (and therefore the fundamentalist viewpoint) begins to lose its hold on the people of the town. Less successful answers thought the scene took place in the courtroom, and omitted Rachel and the mention of Bert altogether. They also confused Brown and Brady and their respective roles and responses, and thought Drummond was being introduced to the play for the first time. Some candidates showed no evidence of having read the play.

Question 10

Very few candidates answered this question – on a major character in the play – by referring to the play as a whole. Most mistakenly only used the very limited reference to Drummond in the passage in **Question 9**. Whilst they found interesting and accurate things to say about the passage, these responses were necessarily self-limiting.

LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

Paper 0486/32
Paper 32 Drama (Open Text)

Key messages

- The most successful candidates were aware of the conventions of the Drama genre, understood that the texts are scripts for performance, and exhibited a personal response to them.
- Candidates needed to pay explicit attention to the wording of the question and to concentrate on how authors achieve their effects.
- The most useful opening paragraphs were brief, focused clearly on the specific question and avoided generalities, lengthy historical detail or elaborate context setting. Conclusions need to be more than a reiteration.
- A high level of achievement can only be gained by a detailed response to the author's dramatic and linguistic effects coupled with attention to what characters say, think, feel and do.
- Referring closely to the text, most effectively in the form of quotation, is the key to high achievement.
- Merely identifying literary terms or themes is an inadequate response to the tasks set.

General comments

Candidates had clearly benefitted from thorough and sensitive teaching and several answers communicated remarkable knowledge, individuality, engagement and enjoyment. Although this is not a requirement of the syllabus, it was encouraging to see candidates learning informed by having seen or viewed the plays in production.

In answers to passage-based questions, strong candidates briefly established the context with selection of apt material. The key to success was to explore the passage in detail, quote from it extensively and comment on the content of the dialogue, the language used, the stagecraft, the dramatic effectiveness and the impact on the audience. Less successful responses barely quoted from the passage or wrote about stage directions, punctuation and imagery without any comment on what was actually happening in the scene.

Too many responses this session used labels such as capitalist/socialist, protagonist/antagonist, American Dream, social responsibility, and anti-Semitism, as if merely mentioning these terms was sufficient to answer the question. The terms were often misused or misapplied, detracting from the quality of the answer.

There were many very effective answers which explored effects such as the creation of tension, intensity of emotion, use of conflict, humour, dramatic irony, foreshadowing, contrast and variety of tone with personal engagement, skill and maturity.

In answer to the discursive questions, the strongest answers selected the most apt material. Such answers ranged across the text, and included support for ideas in the form of quotation. They did not lose sight of the text as drama and considered both the structure of the play and audience response to key scenes. If the question asked for consideration of two moments, then two moments were distinguished successfully. Some candidates would have benefited from greater familiarity with the ideas of sympathy and many, surprisingly, with suspense, equating it with tension or selecting inappropriate moments in the play.

Candidates who heeded the wording of the question, such as 'striking ways' or 'vividly' produced stronger, more focused responses.

There were many effective attempts this session to discuss the reaction and sensibilities of a contemporary versus modern audience, but the candidate's own reaction and response is the one most desired. Whereas good teaching will include the cultural and historical backgrounds of texts, candidates need to assimilate and internalise this knowledge, rather than simply display it, often at such length that they do not finish their essay and therefore underachieve.

Most candidates used their time well and there were few brief answers. There were fewer purely narrative responses this year, and fewer candidates who seemed determined to answer a question from a previous session.

Comments on specific questions

ARTHUR MILLER: *All My Sons*

Question 1

There were some outstanding answers to this question. The strongest focused sharply on the stagecraft building towards the revelation of Larry's letter. They considered Ann's repetitive insistence on Larry's death, Kate's moving away and then violent wrist-grasping and letter snatching, the dismissal of Joe, the delay in revealing the contents of the letter to the audience, Ann's reluctance and hesitation, and the impact of the "low moan". Many showed a keen and intelligent interest in the complex dramatic context (sometimes, unfortunately, at the expense of attention to the passage) noting that Miller has primed the audience's curiosity about the fate of Larry since the opening scene and that Ann has been carrying this agonising information throughout, and that the letter will lead directly to Joe's suicide. Only the most accomplished understood the awkwardness at the start of the passage and what the "it" is that Ann is "not going to do anything about" – and Joe's obvious relief at this. Less successful candidates were often uncertain about the context for the passage, sometimes placing it before George's arrival, or before the revelation of Joe's guilt to Chris and to Ann. Joe's presence in the scene was often ignored entirely and many insisted that it is Kate who tells him to go. Several candidates stated that Larry flew P40s and was therefore killed directly by Joe, or that Kate already knew he was dead. Some candidates were extremely critical of Ann, seeing her as a faithless and a ruthless betrayer of her father.

Question 2

The question of sympathy for Chris was often handled with great sensitivity and a variety of convincing arguments were advanced by successful candidates: the references to his idealism and essential niceness supplied by many of the other characters, his self-deprecating humour, the professional and personal sacrifices he has made to keep his parents happy, his traumatic wartime experiences and survivor's guilt, his diffident courtship, his devastation at the revelation of his father's guilt, his pain and guilt at the end of the play and the likelihood of continued suffering. Answers were often supported by well-chosen and wide ranging reference to the text. Some candidates challenged the terms of the question to an unhelpful extent with arguments about his "unsympathetic" qualities (self-delusion bordering on hypocrisy, weakness, compromise). Other less convincing answers concentrated on arguments about sibling rivalry with Larry, which the play scarcely supports. Others drifted into narratives demonstrating pain and suffering, but never fully addressed the idea of "sympathy".

J. B. PRIESTLEY: *An Inspector Calls*

Question 3

There were many highly competent answers to this question which worked through the five characters in turn and differentiated between their responses with well-selected support. The very best heeded the wording of the question and analysed how Priestley's writing vividly conveys the responses, not merely what the responses were. Such answers brought out the dramatic qualities of the conflicts and recriminations portrayed in the passage, often placing the anger, bitterness, guilt and confidence displayed by Sheila and Eric in the context of their earlier behaviour in the play. The generational contrast between honesty and self-awareness, and concealment and self-preservation, was often thoughtfully addressed. Less successful answers drifted into unexplored generalisations about capitalism and socialism, overstated Gerald's lack of concern and bracketed him unreservedly with the senior Birlings, and misconstrued Mrs Birling's passivity as

guilt. Confident candidates identified the immediate context and the unmasking of the Inspector as a fraud at the start of their answers, and often found it ironic that Mrs Birling's only contribution to the passage, after all that has transpired and her own appalling contribution to Eva's suffering, is to remonstrate with her husband about his language.

Question 4

"Suspense" proved to be a challenging concept for many candidates and was often loosely interpreted as "a moment of tension/conflict". The most accomplished answers tended to make shrewd and specific "moment" choices, most notably the Act-spanning delays before the confirmations of Gerald and Eric's involvement and the nervous tension generated by hearing only one side of the telephone conversations in Act Three. The gradual realisation of Eric's role in the tragedy by the audience, his sister and finally his mother, was often handled particularly well, with sensitive attention to the impact of the dramatic irony and serious implications for all those involved. Arguments about the building of suspense *before* the Inspector's arrival in Act One were less convincing, though the impact of the lighting changes which greet his entrance and of his intimidating presence and manner was often thoughtfully explored. It was difficult with some answers to tell which two "moments" were being selected – as the coverage was so wide-ranging and unspecific.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *The Merchant of Venice*

Question 5

High achieving candidates commented on the unusual nature of this scene in which minor characters are updating the audience on a series of dramatic offstage incidents, and explored Shakespeare's reasons for this choice. These answers questioned the reliability of two unapologetic anti-Semites mocking the anguish of Shylock in discovering that his daughter has run off with a Christian and with his valuables. Intelligent connections were often made between the dramatic losses and isolation experienced by both Shylock and his adversary, Antonio, and the dramatic contrast in the sympathies of Salerio and Solanio in portraying their respective situations. The most accomplished answers were sharply aware of the ominous implications for Antonio in the possible loss of his vessel, and the ways in which the concern of the two narrators and the reminder of the "Jew's bond" are priming the audience for future conflict and the courtroom scene. Close attention to the language depicting the pathos of Bassanio's parting from Antonio, and Shylock's comically exaggerated agitation, was often a feature of the best answers. Less confident candidates often displayed confusion about the order of events and about the various ships, gondolas and vessels cited in the passage, sometimes concentrating almost exclusively on Shylock and not commenting on the second half of the passage.

Question 6

Strong answers to this question ranged confidently and selectively across the text to demonstrate the malevolent intensity and obsessiveness of Shylock's revenge plot, and often contrasted this with the comic table-turning which Portia and Nerissa inflict on Bassanio and Gratiano in 'the ring plot'. Shylock's famous Act 3 Scene 1 speech outlining his grievances and justifying his vengeful intent was often thoughtfully explored, and his implacability in the courtroom scene set against the demands for mercy from Portia and others. Fewer answers, surprisingly, explored the striking nature of Shylock's revenge being turned against him so dramatically in this scene. Successful candidates were, however, prepared to weigh up the morality of the Christian "revenge" meted out to Shylock. Less confident candidates often drifted into narrative approaches, or insisted that Jessica and Launcelot were simply getting back at Shylock by deserting him.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Henry V*

Question 7

Successful candidates divided their attention between the two strands of the question. The best saw this as the most subdued of the Eastcheap scenes because of the death of Falstaff and the imminent departure of the three men and the boy to France, and some made the downbeat point that only Pistol will survive to the end of the play. Some found the innocent images which the Hostess ascribes to Falstaff at the moment of his death and the repetitive insistence on his stone-coldness moving, whereas others found the "christom child" images ironically amusing given Falstaff's lifestyle choices, and the Hostess's handling of the dead Knight bawdily comic. There was much thoughtful unpicking of her malapropisms and some references to the running joke of Bardolph's nose. The irony in Pistol's warnings to the Hostess given the criminal intent of his French trip was often pointed out, and the reasons behind Nym's sad inability to kiss the Hostess goodbye

also noted. Less successful candidates tended to quote sections and to label them “amusing” or “moving”, but found exploration of both the language and the context very difficult. Some clearly wanted to focus on Henry’s development rather than the set question, and saw the passage as merely portraying the youthful excesses he has now outgrown.

Question 8

There were some strikingly strong, detailed and wide-ranging answers to this question and, conversely, some very vague and generalised responses. The best answers to this question could anchor thoughtful reflections on the French to specific details. Candidates who explored the implications of the tennis ball gift, the contrast between the Dauphin and his father, the negligent defending of Harfleur, the vaingloriousness and triviality of the pre-battle conversation and the brutal slaying of the baggage boys tended to be the most successful. Some confident candidates also managed to refine and extend their argument by focusing on Katherine’s liveliness and good humour, Montjoy’s honourable conduct, and the King’s restraint and common sense. Less successful candidates constructed arguments which focused more on Henry than the French, or wrote undeveloped arguments about the contrast with Henry’s forces.

J. LAWRENCE AND R. E. LEE: *Inherit The Wind*

Question 9

There were some strong responses to Hornbeck’s first appearance, and many picked up and made good use of the hints in the introductory stage directions such as: “sneers...contrast...impertinent...contempt...”, to scrutinise his words and actions throughout the passage. His sarcasm was often thoughtfully explored and his jokes, largely at the expense of Hillsboro and its attitudes, explained. The most accomplished not only engaged closely with his language (particularly his description of Brady) but also with the stage action and the use of his straw hat, his response to the monkey, and his choice of the hot dog. Some candidates were totally immune to his humour and expressed rather overstated hostility to Hornbeck for this early stage of the play. Other candidates took the question as an opportunity to write about attitudes in Hillsboro, rather than about Hornbeck himself, and the striking introduction of a major character.

Question 10

Candidates tended to be confident exploring her early timidity, fear of her father, concern for Bert and unthinking acceptance of the community ethos. They were not always as sharply focused on the “change” moments and particularly her public defences of Bert in court and at the bible meeting, and, most importantly, her rebirth as a free thinker (with suitcase) in the final scene.

LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

Paper 0486/33
Paper 33 Drama (Open Text)

Key messages

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ARTHUR MILLER: *All My Sons*

Question 1

This was a popular choice. To answer this question fully, candidates needed to move beyond what the feelings of the character are, to consider how they are strikingly conveyed through stage directions, tone and language. Many candidates identified that Kate is angry at the start of the passage because she thinks the family want to accept Larry's death. Stronger candidates went on to explore how her tone is conveyed in the stage directions and italicised words. Many candidates thought it was striking that Kate refused to accept Larry's death after three-and-a-half years and wanted to avoid Chris's repeated requests to forget Larry. Stronger answers considered how this is conveyed: by Kate dramatically pressing the top of her head and asking for an aspirin to try to change the conversation. Perceptive responses developed an analysis of this to suggest that Kate's repeated headaches are the result of the emotional and mental effort it takes her to maintain her belief that Larry is not dead. Most candidates noted the striking change of tone as Kate's '*smile vanishes*', and she conveys her suspicions to Joe about Chris and Ann's marriage. Her conversation with Joe was often explored in detail: many candidates commented on Kate's striking manner of simply stating what she wishes to be true, in this case: '*He's not going to marry her.*' The best candidates moved on from Kate to consider the thoughts and feelings of Chris and Joe; suggesting that Chris cared for Kate, but that he wanted her to acknowledge Larry's death so that he could get on with his life and marry Ann. They considered this was strikingly conveyed in Chris's first speech and noted its emotional intensity as she looks into his face, and he pleads with her to forget Larry. The repeated '*Mother*', hesitant phrasing shown by the ellipsis and dash, and the gentle questions were all taken as evidence of his love and concern for her. Chris's use of the train metaphor was often explained in simple terms, such as that the train represented Larry, rather than explored, as in the frustration Chris feels is strikingly conveyed in the passivity of the passengers and their lack of action and control of the situation, as they wait in limbo for something which is never going to arrive. Candidates didn't find as much to say about Joe, but most pointed out that Keller's challenge to Kate's delusion is very weak in his "*So what?*" and "*Now listen, kid...*" because he doesn't want to upset her. Useful stage directions have him "*sharply watching her reaction*" and he tries to jolly her along.

Question 2

This was also a popular choice, and candidates took different approaches to this question. The best answers tracked the theme of deception through the whole play and across a range of characters. Some focused on one main character and explored his or her self-deception in great detail, while others considered Kate, Chris and Joe, and dealt more briefly with each of them. To answer this question fully, candidates needed to do more than identify the character's self-deception; they also needed to consider its significance in the play. Most candidates dealt with Joe and his self-deception about his responsibility for the deaths of the 21 air crew, as well as Larry, and his treatment of Steve Deever. Stronger candidates considered his motives for maintaining his deception: that he needed to build up his business to provide financially for his wife and family. A few perceptive candidates thought he was deceiving himself over his motives, too, because it can't be right to value the success of a business above the lives of young men – including one of your own sons. Some candidates pointed out that the significance of this is so central to the play that it is held in its title; and that by the end of the play, Joe has realised that the dead men were "All My Sons", prompting him to atone for his guilt with his suicide. Most candidates identified Kate's self-deception as being about Larry's death, which affects her ability to accept Chris and Ann's relationship: if she were to accept Larry's death, she says she would also have to accept that Joe killed him, which would lead to his criminal act about the cracked cylinders being acknowledged. Candidates who considered Chris's self-deception – about his father's guilt – also explored his experiences during the war, when he witnessed men sacrificing their own lives so that others might live. Some candidates did not consider the significance of the self-deception at all, thus limiting their answers.

J. B. PRIESTLEY: *An Inspector Calls*

Question 3

This was a popular choice of text and question. Candidates generally found plenty of material for comment in the passage: the strongest answers remained firmly focused on the passage itself, and the question which directs candidates to explore the writing. The most successful answers often selected some of the following: Mrs Birling's severe condemnation of her own son, and the manner in which she does this; the dramatic irony of her being the only one not aware of this, heightened by Sheila's increasingly desperate attempts to stop her; Sheila's crying; the Inspector's methods of setting the trap for Mrs Birling; his control of the whole scene, down to looking at his watch; the extreme emotion of all the Birlings as they realise the truth; and the orchestrated climax of the last three lines. Some approached their answer by commenting on the dramatic contrast between Mrs Birling, Sheila, and the Inspector. Perceptive answers showed understanding both of the writer at work here, and the response of the audience. The tone of the characters, for example Mrs Birling's striking, formal and harsh sentencing of the young man, as she numbers her points and leaves no room for doubt (*'he'd be entirely responsible'*, as she speaks *'triumphantly'*) were explored. The highest achieving candidates commented on the striking staging of the last three lines, such as the heightened tension of the silence on stage and auditorium, created as the Inspector holds up his hand; the increased anticipation as the front door is heard, and all characters on stage look towards the door to focus the audience on the person entering; Eric's entrance and his *'pale and distressed'* appearance seeming to confirm his transgressions; but also Priestley's dramatic stopping of the scene at that climax before the interrogation of Eric can begin. Less confident candidates wrote a list of the stage directions and punctuation used and asserted they were striking, without consideration of the character speaking and the context, and with little understanding of the piece as drama.

Question 4

Most candidates used detailed material from the start of the play to comment on the engagement. Most thought it was memorable that Mr Birling was so keen on the marriage because it united his business interests with Gerald's family, but it is over-stating matters to claim that the marriage was actually arranged by Sheila's parents. Many candidates explored the effects of Gerald's affair with Daisy, and thought Sheila was right to break off the engagement. Stronger answers went on to consider Sheila's role: she learns to assume responsibility for Eva's suicide during the play, and so she is a changed person by the end, whereas Gerald does not consider he is to blame, especially after he discovers that the Inspector is fake and apparently no-one outside will know of his affair. There was some exploration of the language used by Sheila at moments of distress. Perceptive candidates often explored how Priestley uses the relationship to comment on particular themes: social class, the role of women, social responsibility, social morality, money, or ideas of romantic love. Some candidates needed to move beyond a recounting of the engagement and the events leading to its being broken, to consider what was memorable about how Priestley depicts it. Candidates needed to select appropriate material from throughout the play to support their answer.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *The Merchant of Venice*

Question 5

Candidates who gave a brief context for this scene had a clearer overview of Shylock's motives and attitudes during this passage. Shylock's lengthy opening speech listing his suffering at the hands of Antonio was very well commented on by most candidates, who were often able to select specific words and phrases and comment on their effects. Popular ones were: *'misbeliever'*, which gave candidates the opportunity to point out that Shylock was abused because of his faith; and *'cut-throat dog'*, which candidates thought debased Shylock to the lowly, unclean level of *'dog'* and stripped him of his humanity. Most candidates unsurprisingly felt sympathy for Shylock at this stage in the passage, and during Antonio's response. Some candidates maintained their sympathy during Shylock's next speech, taking his stated desire to be friends, his *'kindness'*, and his offer to lend money without interest at face value. Candidates who had a better overview of the passage judged Shylock to be cleverly baiting a trap for Antonio here. Some candidates seemed to stop before reaching Shylock's last speech, which meant that they missed a key point: his setting the bond of the pound of flesh. Stronger answers commented that this horrific bond clearly shows Shylock's hate of Antonio and his murderous desire for revenge, and they varied in their personal response to him, with most disliking Shylock for his treachery and thinking he has now gone too far. Some thought he was justified in his revenge after the constant abuse received from Antonio; others quoted *'pleaseth'* to show that they felt

disgusted by Shylock enjoying the thought of Antonio's painful death. The question encourages a personal response; some candidates simply needed to say what they felt, rather than spending too long listing the differences between an Elizabethan audience's response and that of a modern-day audience, instead of focusing on the writing of the passage.

Question 6

There were many answers to this question too. Candidates were split down the middle as to whether they were persuaded that the marriage would be happy or not, with most taking a balanced approach before deciding. Some felt that they never really knew each other very well before getting married, and that Bassanio's getting into debt would make them unhappy. There seems little doubt that Bassanio was attracted to Portia by her wealth and looks; but there is mutual attraction there too. Candidates decided how far Portia's hints to Bassanio as to which casket to choose were actual cheating, or rather an intelligent way to follow her late father's will and still get her own way too. Bassanio's friendship with Antonio was often seen as too close to allow the marriage to be happy; but Portia's willingness to help Antonio for Bassanio's sake, and her ability to do so, was often viewed as evidence of her love for Bassanio. The ring was sometimes seen as a betrayal by Bassanio, and as a sign of a future of betrayals and an unhappy marriage; but others dismissed this as unimportant, since Portia forgives Bassanio. Whatever conclusion candidates reached, they needed to select appropriate material from throughout the play in support of their case. It was evident from their engagement with the task that candidates often enjoyed answering this question.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: Henry V

Question 7

There were very few responses to this question. Candidates had a good overview of the context and highlighted the despair of the French, their denigration of the English and their urgency to fight back. The comedic aspects of the French exclamations were largely ignored, as were the exaggerated descriptions of English weather and the English themselves. Responses were generally narrative in approach, with very little comment on the language or the passage as a piece of drama.

Question 8

Too few answers were submitted to make comment appropriate.

J. LAWRENCE & R. E. LEE: Inherit the Wind

Question 9

Too few answers were submitted to make comment appropriate.

Question 10

Too few answers were submitted to make comment appropriate.

LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

Paper 0486/41
Paper 41 Unseen

Key messages

- All four Assessment Objectives for English Literature are tested in this paper. For higher marks, knowledge and understanding must be supplemented with appreciation of the writer's effects. Personal response should be critical and evaluative.
- A significant number of responses were overly long and repetitive. Stronger responses use the reading time to ensure that an answer is well-planned.
- Responses which worked through the text in sequence usually showed better awareness of language and form.
- Careful reading of the question, bullet points and rubric will clarify most difficulties of surface understanding. Interpretation should be based on the language and implications of the text, and not speculation about what is not there.

General comments

The overall standard of response to this paper was high. Candidates approach the texts with energy and enthusiasm, and are usually very well prepared. Knowledge of the effects used by writers is evident and quotation is often extensively used to support observations. Most understand the need to go beyond surface meaning and explore the deeper implications of the text, and many show good awareness of the writer at work, shaping and structuring their language with an emotive purpose. Many showed appreciation of effects individual to a particular genre, such as sound effects and rhythm in poetry, and manipulation of narrative viewpoint and time sequence in prose. Nevertheless, there were responses which were close to paraphrase, or did not look beyond the surface details of the text to question their deeper meaning or the writer's purpose. For Band 5 or above, it is essential that candidates begin to respond to the way the way the writer uses language and produce a supported interpretation of the text's overall meaning, including what is implicit. In this way, the Unseen tests all the Assessment Objectives for Cambridge IGCSE English Literature.

Many responses would have benefited from better use of reading time and more effective planning, in order to ensure that essays were carefully timed and structured. Some very long answers made such an attempt to be exhaustive that details earlier in the poem or extract were over-interpreted, leaving no time to consider the impact of the ending. It is worth remembering that the development of a prose passage or poem is likely to be underlined by the final lines, images or sentence, so it is a good idea to achieve sound understanding of the last lines before beginning to write about the first. The bullet points are also crafted to help candidates structure their own responses and appreciate the structure of the writing. The third bullet point therefore tends to draw attention to details towards the end of the text, inviting candidates to consider their meaning and effect. A clear understanding of how a passage ends is essential for higher marks, and will help to shape an interpretation of the writer's purpose and intended effect on the reader. The third bullet point usually guides candidates to make an interpretative or evaluative judgment on the text's effect.

Some answers are simply far too long. Marks are not awarded for quantity of observations, but for the quality of their interpretation. Obscure allegorical readings or displays of technical terms do not attract marks unless convincingly linked to overall meaning. Some candidates become too absorbed in minute detail to be able to see the whole picture. Very strong responses need not be longer than 3 to 4 sides of standard handwriting – about five or six paragraphs. The best responses often included a brief plan outlining how specific points would be made in each paragraph.

Better planning and timing would also allow candidates to give due weight to each section of the text, or, if they chose, to each bullet point. The bullet points encourage candidates to work through the passage in chronological sequence, and this is almost always a more successful approach than trying to spot features of

language, form and structure according to a pre-learnt formula, without attention to the way the writer has shaped and developed her or his material in order to reveal meaning gradually to the reader. Responses to poetry are more likely to avoid misunderstandings if the candidate pays attention to the meaning of each sentence, with awareness that the meaning of one line often depends on running on into the next. Misinterpretations tend to be caused by readings that over-interpret individual lines or images without looking at their context, or simply by not reading the rubric and bullet points carefully enough. These are written to clarify any difficulties of literal understanding, such as the identities of characters and the gender of the author.

There are still some candidates who are convinced that this paper asks them to look for 'hidden meanings' and that any personal response to the text is a valid one. AO4 is aimed to develop 'informed personal response', based on close attention to the language, tone and meaning of the text. Candidates should not be looking to construct a narrative of their own which they impose on the text, or to use the text as a springboard for personal reminiscence, moralising reflection or comparisons with their studied texts. These approaches are not rewarded by the mark scheme. Personal response needs to arise out of the evidence of the text, and reflection on the mood it is intended to create.

There was a stronger than usual tendency in this session for candidates to favour one question more than the other. Candidates should be prepared to write about either poetry or prose. A shorter, and apparently more linguistically straightforward poem does not necessarily mean an easier question: it may require more work to unpack the subtleties of language, tone and implied meaning. Longer pieces of narrative may be so packed with imagery that a well-chosen selection of details will warrant a high mark without needing to be exhaustive, as long as there is understanding of what they contribute to narrative development. Once again, diligent use of the reading time to consider both questions, and to annotate texts and plan a response will lead to stronger answers. Highlighting and interpreting the more difficult or unusual images or expressions before beginning to write gives much better focus to answers than an approach which 'works it out as you go along'.

This is guidance to encourage centres to make good responses even better. Examiners are sensitive to whatever approach candidates choose to take, and will give patient attention to long and exploratory answers. They often ignore the occasional false note or misreading as marking is not punitive or negative. However, they value answers which are thoughtful, well-constructed, concisely argued and critical. Such answers are more likely to show clarity of understanding and sensitivity of interpretation.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

The poem, *The Pan* by Ted Hughes, was the less popular of the options in this session, yet produced some of the very best responses. The poem was published in the volume *Birthday Letters* and is therefore autobiographical; with an ominous and eerie premonition of the death of his wife, Sylvia Plath, and a vision of himself with his future mistress, Assia Wevill. However, no knowledge of these biographical details was either assumed or expected, as there was plenty for candidates to find intriguing about its mysterious and quasi-supernatural elements.

This was a good example of a text requiring a carefully planned response. Those who used the bullet points and gave them equal weight and time found that these assisted them in identifying and interpreting different stages of the surface narrative, and exploring the implied feelings of the man who experienced them. However, close attention to surface meaning – and especially to pronouns – was essential for understanding. A further complication was the poem's syntax, as it is made up of just two sentences. The rubric pointed out the characters of the poem are a man, his wife and a baby, and the bullet points drew the candidates' attention to the descriptions of the man and woman on the pavement. Clear understanding required attention to the final twist, that 'the man so infinitely more alive...Was himself'. This ghostly double needs to be understood as a premonition from the future, which the man does not even recognise or notice at the time. This makes more sense of the action of buying the eponymous pan from an ironmonger's which has 'been closed ... for two years'. The poem is playing games with time and has a double narrative, in a form candidates are more likely to have come across in film or narrative fiction. It is therefore an unusual and thought-provoking poem, and it is easy to see why some candidates were wary of it, but each stage of its supernatural and fatalistic narrative is full of interesting and suggestive details, which many candidates explored with sensitivity and insight.

Some strong responses noted the odd effect of giving such a mundane title as 'The Pan' to such an eerie and unnerving narrative, and good answers saw the connection between the pan and the quotidian domesticity which seems to weigh the man down in the earlier part of the poem – even if he doesn't realise this yet. Several noticed that this part of the poem seems to be freighted with heavily adjectival descriptive content, in order to give this uncanny experience a background of verisimilitude, contrasting with the apparent normality of family life. The main street is 'long', the town 'small', the sun 'brassy' yet 'wet' – a number puzzled at the details and wondered if they were quite as realistic as they appeared to be. Most candidates appreciated that the man seemed weary, the car over-stuffed, and the small town less than welcoming. The couple's new life seemed inauspicious: many noticed the word 'new' is repeated for emphasis, and some noticed the contrast with 'stripped' and 'strange' as suggestions that this fresh start was not a comfortable one. Many noticed the length of the journey, the setting sun and the 'tilting' street and read them as bad omens, observing that 'strange' is also repeated. Not only are the couple strangers to the town, but strange things might happen there too. The references to 'milk' and 'babyfood' contrast the domesticity and vulnerability of the family's existence with the spooky suggestion that they are in some kind of ghost town where the shop is closed and empty, and both history and geometry seem to be skewed. Several noticed how the alliteration of 'car crammed...carrier bags...crockery, cutlery / And crossed...' communicates the awkwardness of the journey and the move. A few went further and suggested that this awkwardness extends to the father himself and his awkward feelings as he 'extricated his stiffness', with some suggesting that he feels prematurely aged by the impedimenta of family life.

Many read the poem as essentially a ghost story. This worked well as long as the ghost was appreciated as coming from the man's future rather than his past, an interpretation which some understandably struggled with. It was impressive to see how many were able to intuit an ominous atmosphere from the tone of the poem and from the details of its language, although candidates needed to be careful that their interpretations were grounded in the text and did not become too speculative. Many wanted to link the future fate of man, wife and baby to the 'strange' and apparently unwelcoming town. This was often because the last six lines were not understood. The second sentence makes much more sense once it is appreciated that 'the man on the pavement' is the same person as the man 'returning / With the little pan', but two years on into the future.

Some (understandably) were a little confused by the idea of 'on the pavement' or the fact that the woman wore a 'next-to-nothing' dress 'slashed to the hip', and hastily assumed that they were beggars, or that she was a prostitute and that this constituted the effect of the threat to the man. Some were closer when they suggested that the word 'slashed', accentuated by its position at the beginning of the line, and the 'leopard-claw ear-rings' might imply a form of violence, and several picked up the sensuality of the 'silk' shawl and the 'naked' shoulders. However, a more careful reading would have picked up the glamour of the 'long evening dress' and the silk, and those who appreciated these details also understood the contrast with being 'squeezed' and 'weary' behind the wheel of a little family car. The best answers were alert to the idea that it is the ghost, paradoxically, who is 'infinitely more alive' than either the man or the woman in the car. Does that suggest that they are in some way already dead? There were various interesting ideas about the kind of future which is being presented to the unknowing couple, but those who tackled these difficulties usually worked out that some kind of danger was in prospect, by probing why he is 'helpless to warn' his past self. Some wrote powerfully and presciently about ways in which premonitions and helplessness before fate are characteristics of tragedy. Good candidates noticed the poet's irony in describing the car as 'happy'. Only the strongest appreciated that the man is seeing different visions of his own future life, and unconsciously beginning to make a choice, which he is only aware of with the benefit of hindsight.

Question 2

The prose passage was an extract from a short story by A. S. Byatt called *The Thing in the Forest* and is taken from near its beginning when two girls, Penny and Primrose, meet because they have both been evacuated to the countryside to avoid bombing, only to encounter dangers of a different nature. The passage is full of references to England in the Second World War, but it was not necessary to recognise this historical context; it was enough to be aware of the girls' sense of displacement and the effect this has not only on their feelings but also the way in which they experience things. It was important to understand that most of the description in the story was from the limited perspective of the girls, while the third bullet point made reference to 'tension and a sense of unease' which gave candidates a broad hint as to the genre of the passage, and the ways in which descriptions and allusions might set up a dangerous or surreal situation which heightens the girls' feelings of alienation and isolation.

This question proved to be a popular one, as candidates found it easy to identify the girls' childish fears and dislikes, and to appreciate the ways in which their friendship starts to develop. What discriminated stronger answers was the ability to write effectively about later stages of the passage. While most appreciated the personification of the train, and the discomforts of the journey, not all were able to appreciate the change of

perspective in the third paragraph, when the narrator draws attention to the limits of the perspective of the two young girls – adding a degree of irony to the way in which their self-absorbed feelings are focalised, and showing how little they understand of the wider world and the real threats it presents them with. Some were confused by the time shift; they found it hard to distinguish clearly between the things the girls talk about as experiences they disliked, and what is actually happening on the train. This highlighted the importance of exploring narrative perspective and use of flashback, or retrospective irony, when discussing the techniques used by prose writers.

A third-person narrative is not necessarily 'omniscient'. In this case, the girls are described from the outside, adding a degree of distance and irony, but what they see is largely portrayed through their limited perspective, and this colours the reality of what is visible to us as readers, through the grimy windows of train and bus. Only the very best saw that this is itself a complex metaphor for the children's lack of clear vision of where they are going or what they are seeing along the way. Many more appreciated that the children feel obscurely guilty, as if their evacuation were 'a sort of punishment', and understand little of the reality of the situation, conveying their innocence, and vulnerability, to the reader.

Most appreciated that we see the others on the train as the girls do: as a 'mongrel battalion of the lost', vaguely threatening '*not very good children*', 'alien' and 'a potential gang'. A few read these descriptions literally, but most saw that the girls are really expressing their own fears and sense of alienation. Phrases like 'try to sit together, and things' show that we are presented with their childish view of who is 'nice' and who is 'not very good'. Many appreciated that it is their childish imagination that invests the steam engine with the qualities of some kind of monster, giving 'great bellowing sighs' and pricking 'face and fingers like hot needles'. They saw the journey as part despairing and part torture for the young girls, and picked up the childish sensuous comparisons ('the dank smell of unwashed trousers') and rhythmic and slightly ominous onomatopoeia ('tap-tap-tap-CRASH.'). Some appreciated the ways in which all the children's senses are assaulted in an unpleasant way in the second paragraph, developing tension and unease; especially as the girls' destination is so anonymous. Even when they finally catch glimpses of the outside world beyond the steam and smoke, they only see unattractive 'flooded fields' and 'furrowed hillsides', 'empty of life' and deprived of identity. Good answers appreciated that the description of what the girls see is a mirror image of their own loss of identity, sense of being threatened or punished, and uncertainty of destination.

The detail in the third paragraph which candidates found most helpful to single out was the comparison to 'Hansel and Gretel'. The children are obviously comparing this real-life nightmare to a horror story they are familiar with, with children being sent into the woods for punishment. This comparison sets up the description of the woods in the fourth paragraph. This kind of comparative detail was only noticed by those candidates who had planned their answers carefully, and therefore appreciated the direction and endpoint of this particular extract. A larger number of candidates appreciated the girls' unvoiced anxiety, and sense of guilt, and noticed that they felt 'the erasure was because of them'. Because they don't understand the war situation, they feel that they are themselves obscurely to blame. Here too, candidates appreciated the sensuous qualities of the descriptions, and their links to familiar childish dislikes, from eating semolina to having your hair washed. The children's comforts, sharing their pet hates and a square or two of chocolate, were clearly understood and some engaged in imaginative ways with the significance of the 'great white goose' when contrasted with the 'inky pond'. Some suggested the goose represented the innocence of the children and the pond the murky nature of their surroundings.

Good responses invariably had something to say about the short but intense final paragraph. While a few were still confused by the reference to the 'crocodile', in spite of the footnote, most who got this far into the passage were able to appreciate that the atmosphere is growing increasingly dark and ominous, moving from a 'dark grey' sky past 'dark leaves on dark wooden arms on a dark sky' to the gleam of a 'full moon' in the pitch darkness. Those sensitive to the effects of language noted the insistent gloom of the repetition, the sinister references to 'snaking' country lanes and 'whipping branches', and the alliterative 'bumping' of the bus which makes the girls begin to feel sick. They also appreciated that the children feel even more alienated and threatened as they near their destination, and that this might set up later developments in the story. This certainly doesn't seem, to the girls at least, a place of greater safety than the city from which they have been evacuated. The reader shares their sensations to create not only empathy, but also a sense of foreboding. Certainly this passage shows that a prose passage can use just as many descriptive and sensuous techniques as a poem, but can portray just as subjective a viewpoint. Good responses will always consider the writer's purpose, and why she might want to craft such an unsettling start to a story. Some rightly saw this as a clash between innocence and experiences the children don't yet fully understand.

LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

Paper 0486/42
Paper 42 Unseen

Key messages

- All four Assessment Objectives for English Literature are tested in this paper. For higher marks, knowledge and understanding must be supplemented with appreciation of the writer's effects. Personal response should be critical and evaluative.
- A significant number of responses were overly long and repetitive. Stronger responses use the reading time to ensure that an answer is well-planned.
- Responses which worked through the text in sequence usually showed better awareness of language and form.
- Careful reading of the question, bullet points and rubric will clarify most difficulties of surface understanding. Interpretation should be based on the language and implications of the text, and not speculation about what is not there.

General comments

The overall standard of response to this paper was high. Candidates approach the texts with energy and enthusiasm, and are usually very well prepared. Knowledge of the effects used by writers is evident and quotation is often extensively used to support observations. Most understand the need to go beyond surface meaning and explore the deeper implications of the text, and many show good awareness of the writer at work, shaping and structuring their language with an emotive purpose. Many showed appreciation of effects individual to a particular genre, such as sound effects and rhythm in poetry, and manipulation of narrative viewpoint and time sequence in prose. Nevertheless, there were responses which were close to paraphrase, or did not look beyond the surface details of the text to question their deeper meaning or the writer's purpose. For Band 5 or above, it is essential that candidates begin to respond to the way the way the writer uses language and produce a supported interpretation of the text's overall meaning, including what is implicit. In this way, the Unseen tests all the Assessment Objectives for Cambridge IGCSE English Literature.

Many responses would have benefited from better use of reading time and more effective planning, in order to ensure that essays were carefully timed and structured. Some very long answers made such an attempt to be exhaustive that details earlier in the poem or extract were over-interpreted, leaving no time to consider the impact of the ending. It is worth remembering that the development of a prose passage or poem is likely to be underlined by the final lines, images or sentence, so it is a good idea to achieve sound understanding of the last lines before beginning to write about the first. The bullet points are also crafted to help candidates structure their own responses and appreciate the structure of the writing. The third bullet point therefore tends to draw attention to details towards the end of the text, inviting candidates to consider their meaning and effect. A clear understanding of how a passage ends is essential for higher marks, and will help to shape an interpretation of the writer's purpose and intended effect on the reader. The third bullet point usually guides candidates to make an interpretative or evaluative judgment on the text's effect.

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Comments on specific questions

Question 1

The poem, *The Flowers*, by Selima Hill, proved overwhelmingly the more popular choice in this session. It has a clear narrative and language is deceptively straightforward and plain. Nevertheless, complex emotions are implicit in the writing and the poem is strongly visual, with several significant images. Moreover, its true meaning is quite elusive: the precise relationship between the persona and the girl's grandfather is never defined, nor is the reason why she finds it hard to achieve closure after his death. This elegiac poem seems to describe a recent bereavement, but that does not explain the neglect of the grave and gravestone. The poem appears to be autobiographical but it is not truly confessional. More recent poems by Hill further explore her troubled relationship with her father. The focus of 'this event' is much more the relationship between mother and daughter, and candidates who made good use of the bullet points found themselves steered in this direction. What is moving about the poem is the different ways in which they grieve. Both of their actions are ambiguous and need careful exploration. Feelings are not directly expressed, and when there is direct speech (represented by italics) it comes only from the daughter. The final pronoun and image shows them united as they move 'in and out of the ruts', and it was the sign of a stronger response that the candidate realised that the poem might be about the mother and daughter and their different kinds of mourning rather than the grandfather.

Some candidates were slightly thrown by the simplicity of the choice of verse form, as it lacked a regular rhyme scheme or rhythm. However, careful attention to punctuation, syntax and line lengths revealed plenty of subtlety of rhythmic variation which contributes a great deal to the poem's tone. Many candidates were able to notice the effects of enjambment, and terminal or medial pauses (usually labelled caesura), and appreciated changes of pace and tone and what they imply about the poet's feelings. It was usually more effective to make observations about structure and tone early in the response, rather than adding a separate paragraph late in the essay, just as it is always better to integrate comment on language with comment on meaning. The mourning rituals of the daughter were well observed by most candidates, who rightly saw the

wild flowers as a tribute to her relationship with her grandfather, and a sign of how well she knew him as they were the flowers he 'liked best'. Quite a lot of candidates tried to interpret the 'wild' flowers as a comment on the grandfather: he was wild, he was a lover of nature etc. These were often the same candidates who over-interpreted the 'empty jam-jar' as some kind of symbol of the loss of something sweet. The problem with this kind of over-interpretation is that it focuses on individual details at the expense of the whole stanza or poem. Candidates who over-interpreted the details of the first stanza were often those who had too little to say about the last stanza, showing that good timing and planning are essential in this paper. The 'jam-jar' and 'trowel' add to the mundane tone of the poem, humble and apparently everyday, set by the initial time reference 'after lunch'. More profitable exploration of detail observed the quick pace and practical actions of the daughter, emphasised by the dominance of verbs in this stanza and by the poet's use of enjambment. There was some debate about whether the words 'handfuls' and 'piled' showed the extent of the young girl's feelings or a degree of carelessness. Stronger answers usually commented in some detail on the simile 'like a candle-bearer': it adds a ritualistic element to the girl's 'swaying' movements on the bicycle, emphasised by the reference to 'church', and possibly reminding the poet of the funeral. Good answers always showed awareness of the poet observing her daughter's actions, as this is the most moving element of the description. She is clearly proud, and slightly over-awed 'like a little dog', and the reversal of roles and expectations here needed comment. The mother is the follower, not the initiator.

The passivity of the mother remains important in the long second stanza and is a contrast with the girl's activity, care and pride in the grandfather's name. Stronger answers made interesting links between clearing the grave and making the old man's bed, as she practically and unemotionally tidies his final resting place. Some wondered why the grave had been neglected and turned 'wild', or why the girl had made the man's bed rather than the mother. A few noticed the girl's repeated pride in wanting things to look their 'best', or the laborious sounds of scraping the 'moss from the stone', and contrasted this with the poet's lack of comment and apparent disengagement. Is she overcome with grief? Or guilt? It is better not to speculate too much, but to point out the poem's contrasts, and to understand that the pace of its rhythm is now slower, with more pauses for thought and reflection, and that it contains a flashback to the caring relationship between grandfather and granddaughter.

The poet's feelings emerge most clearly in the final stanza. The first half of this stanza is slow and hesitant and matches the mother's uncertain feelings. Good answers were very aware of the stumbling effect of the repetition of 'how to', or the impact of placing the words 'I hesitated' at the end of a line, and the full stop after the reference to the 'rounded grave'. Those who paid less attention to line-endings and rhythms struggled here. Some thought the words 'Come on' or even 'It's finished now' were said by the mother, not the daughter, and did not appreciate that the mother's silence is expressed through the pauses. However, there were many interesting interpretations of 'It's finished now', picking up suggestions that the phrase might mean different things to mother and daughter, and that the mother finds it hard to share the daughter's pragmatic (and respectful, yet apparently unemotional and brisk) approach to death, and yet is obscurely comforted by it. These very different ways of responding to past grief and distress clearly inspire the description of mother and daughter 'moving apart / and coming together again' on the bicycle ride home. Good answers contrasted their movement together with the way the mother had followed and observed in the first stanza, and the best noticed the first use of the pronoun 'we', and the ways in which the interweaving movements of mother and daughter are imitated by the use of enjambment and end-stopping. The best linked 'the ruts' to various difficulties they had encountered in the suggested narrative of estrangement and loss, and appreciated that the union of mother and daughter, despite their very different characters, is the most moving and powerful image in the poem.

Question 2

The extract from Rose Tremain's *Music and Silence* comes from the very beginning of the novel, and therefore gradually reveals the knowledge required to interpret it. The period setting may have deterred some candidates from attempting the question, but the very densely descriptive and linguistically rich writing certainly gave plenty of opportunity for incisive commentary on language and style to those who did, resulting in some very strong responses. The focus of the question was the vivid quality of the writing, and many wrote highly effectively about the ways in which Tremain brings the gothic setting, and the doubts and fears of Peter Claire, to life. Many appreciated that what he sees is affected by the way he is 'tired from his long sea journey', and a late arrival, but nevertheless required to be ready to perform for the king 'at all times'. Some saw that he may be regretting his own ambitions, feeling homesick, or spooked by the shadows of this Danish castle, and the obscure hierarchies of its topsy-turvy court.

Good answers needed to maintain a thoughtful balance between the realistic elements of the narrative and Peter's internal fantasies, as his imagination almost runs away with him. Those who focussed exclusively on the 'Gothic' elements of the narrative and the hints of the supernatural often wrote very effectively about the

language, but could lack clear understanding of narrative progression, and sometimes became even more absorbed in the play of light and darkness than Peter himself; never getting to the final paragraph and the appearance of the deranged King, with the final suggestion that Peter is after all a professional musician brought to the court by his personal ambition and need for money. Some struggled with the use of a close third person narrative voice, although this is currently a very popular narrative technique among contemporary writers. This is not an omniscient narrative and quite a lot of information is withheld; we see through Peter's eyes, although the narrator uses the third rather than the first person. It would be good preparation for this paper for students to study a range of different narrative techniques and discuss their effects. Candidates might also consider the effect of choice of tense, and consider why this historical narrative is narrated in the present tense.

The short first paragraph and passive voice set up the contrast of light and darkness which many candidates rightly saw as creating an atmosphere for the opening of the novel, perhaps suggesting an opposition between good and evil, or enlightenment and obscurity. The passive voice suggests Peter Claire's own passivity and lack of control, which is explained later in the passage. The lamp itself appears to have a life of its own, and those who read the text more superficially, and saw it as supernatural, did not realise that later it becomes clear that it is actually carried by the 'tall gentleman'. He remains in the shadows but is the only speaking voice in the passage, until Peter finds himself at the door to the King's chamber. This shows the importance of reading the whole passage carefully before leaping to conclusions: most of what appears supernatural or frightening in the passage is actually the result of Peter's hyper-sensitivity and anxiety, which he himself acknowledges as the extract develops.

Many wrote effectively about the play of colours and the symbolic nature of darkness in the second paragraph. Fewer realised that it is a flashback – as more attention to tense would reveal – and that Peter was initially impressed by the 'profound darkness', and has already connected it to 'his own absence of hope'. He seems exhausted both physically and mentally by the rigours of his journey and his displacement from his native land, and the dark castle was rightly seen as a metaphor for his despair. The relief of the third paragraph was usually perceived as only temporary, with some pointing out the potentially chilling implications of the name of the *Vinterstue*.

Good answers made a developed response to the shadow which Peter sees on the wall, and to the pair of silver lions which seem to watch him. Less confident candidates, who viewed images in isolation instead of within the context of the whole narrative, did not quite understand that Peter is merely frightening himself, and not being tortured by a supernatural lamp, or even thought the lions were real rather than ornamental. Stronger responses saw the lions as symbols of the royalty, which has stunned Peter into passivity, and the eyes that seem to watch him as a symptom of his paranoia. Very impressive answers were aware that the 'deformity' is Peter's own lute, and went on to suggest that his personality has in some way been distorted by his own talent. Some wondered why he 'cannot rest' and 'must follow' the lamp, but this is clarified by the next paragraph, when the tall gentleman explains that Peter must play in accordance with royal command and cannot control his own actions or timetable.

The best responses were able to link this to the gothic style, which portrays Peter as a passive and sacrificial victim, and picked up the suggestions in the bullet points that his anxiety and disturbance increase as he gets closer to his audience with the King. We are told that he is 'not well' and the 'physicians have prescribed music'. Some found this idea confusing, although the idea of the healing power of music is a frequent trope in Shakespeare, especially *King Lear* and *The Merchant of Venice*. Most picked up the idea that Peter has frightening premonitions of his fate: 'within this arrival some terrifying departure lies concealed', and that the end of the journey will prove only the start of his problems. Perceptive candidates linked this to the writer's purpose at the opening of the novel. Many wrote well about the developing image of Peter's own shadow, which haunts and frightens him, and now becomes even more distorted by the light cast by the no-longer comforting lamp until 'swallowed by the darkness, with no trace of it remaining', a detail which some thought might prefigure Peter's own fate. This led a few to write too speculatively about what might happen next. It was better to focus on what is there in the passage: it is clear that Peter feels his freedom of thought and action suppressed by the commands of an eccentric court presided over by a mad king. Good answers also linked Peter's anxieties to his own misplaced ambition which has taken him 'so far from the places and people he had loved', and even suggested that his shadow is distorted by his musical talent which has taken him to a place where he feels alienated and lost. One or two personal responses related this to performance anxiety and musician's nerves, while others focussed more on the obscure menace of the castle, as Peter gets closer to the King in his lair.

Candidates missed a lot if they did not write about the final paragraph. It is the bizarre personality of King Christian which has required Peter's journey, and is the culmination of the accumulated tension of the passage. Good answers noted the use of the passive voice in the first sentence, and the silence, anxiety and

obedience to commands in the second. Several pointed out the contrast between the King's commanding voice, 'deep and slow', and dishevelled appearance ('sitting in a chair in his night-shirt'). Strong responses explored the symbolism of the 'pair of scales' and 'clutch of silver coins'. Peter might think he is being judged, or is guilty of some form of betrayal – with several suggesting a biblical allusion. A fear of being weighed up and found wanting certainly lies behind Peter's growing anxiety in this passage, and perhaps a feeling that his professional ambition and desire for reward has driven him too far.

Those responses which engaged sensitively with the many interesting details of the writing were certainly strongly rewarded. Clear understanding of the developing narrative, and the ability to link its different stages to see the passage as a whole, were essential for the highest marks. The passage is meant to be mysterious, engaging and intriguing. As the opening of a novel, the questions it raises will not immediately be answered. Good response to prose passages requires awareness of writers' purposes and techniques. A sense of overall structure is essential, hence the virtue of a patient analysis of each stage of the writing.

LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

Paper 0486/43
Paper 43 Unseen

Key messages

- All four Assessment Objectives for English Literature are tested in this paper. For higher marks, knowledge and understanding must be supplemented with appreciation of the writer's effects. Personal response should be critical and evaluative.
- A significant number of responses were overly long and repetitive. Stronger responses use the reading time to ensure that an answer is well-planned.
- Responses which worked through the text in sequence usually showed better awareness of language and form.
- Careful reading of the question, bullet points and rubric will clarify most difficulties of surface understanding. Interpretation should be based on the language and implications of the text, and not speculation about what is not there.

General comments

The overall standard of response to this paper was high. Candidates approach the texts with energy and enthusiasm, and are usually very well prepared. Knowledge of the effects used by writers is evident and quotation is often extensively used to support observations. Most understand the need to go beyond surface meaning and explore the deeper implications of the text, and many show good awareness of the writer at work, shaping and structuring their language with an emotive purpose. Many showed appreciation of effects individual to a particular genre, such as sound effects and rhythm in poetry, and manipulation of narrative viewpoint and time sequence in prose. Nevertheless, there were responses which were close to paraphrase, or did not look beyond the surface details of the text to question their deeper meaning or the writer's purpose. For Band 5 or above, it is essential that candidates begin to respond to the way the way the writer uses language and produce a supported interpretation of the text's overall meaning, including what is implicit. In this way, the Unseen tests all the Assessment Objectives for Cambridge IGCSE English Literature.

Many responses would have benefited from better use of reading time and more effective planning, in order to ensure that essays were carefully timed and structured. Some very long answers made such an attempt to be exhaustive that details earlier in the poem or extract were over-interpreted, leaving no time to consider the impact of the ending. It is worth remembering that the development of a prose passage or poem is likely to be underlined by the final lines, images or sentence, so it is a good idea to achieve sound understanding of the last lines before beginning to write about the first. The bullet points are also crafted to help candidates structure their own responses and appreciate the structure of the writing. The third bullet point therefore tends to draw attention to details towards the end of the text, inviting candidates to consider their meaning and effect. A clear understanding of how a passage ends is essential for higher marks, and will help to shape an interpretation of the writer's purpose and intended effect on the reader. The third bullet point usually guides candidates to make an interpretative or evaluative judgment on the text's effect.

Some answers are simply far too long. Marks are not awarded for quantity of observations, but for the quality of their interpretation. Obscure allegorical readings or displays of technical terms do not attract marks unless convincingly linked to overall meaning. Some candidates become too absorbed in minute detail to be able to see the whole picture. Very strong responses need not be longer than 3 to 4 sides of standard handwriting – about five or six paragraphs. The best responses often included a brief plan outlining how specific points would be made in each paragraph.

Better planning and timing would also allow candidates to give due weight to each section of the text, or, if they chose, to each bullet point. The bullet points encourage candidates to work through the passage in chronological sequence, and this is almost always a more successful approach than trying to spot features of

language, form and structure according to a pre-learnt formula, without attention to the way the writer has shaped and developed her or his material in order to reveal meaning gradually to the reader. Responses to poetry are more likely to avoid misunderstandings if the candidate pays attention to the meaning of each sentence, with awareness that the meaning of one line often depends on running on into the next. Misinterpretations tend to be caused by readings that over-interpret individual lines or images without looking at their context, or simply by not reading the rubric and bullet points carefully enough. These are written to clarify any difficulties of literal understanding, such as the identities of characters and the gender of the author.

There are still some candidates who are convinced that this paper asks them to look for 'hidden meanings' and that any personal response to the text is a valid one. AO4 is aimed to develop '*informed* personal response', based on close attention to the language, tone and meaning of the text. Candidates should not be looking to construct a narrative of their own which they impose on the text, or to use the text as a springboard for personal reminiscence, moralising reflection or comparisons with their studied texts. These approaches are not rewarded by the mark scheme. Personal response needs to arise out of the evidence of the text, and reflection on the mood it is intended to create.

There was a stronger than usual tendency in this session for candidates to favour one question more than the other. Candidates should be prepared to write about either poetry or prose. A shorter and apparently more linguistically straightforward poem does not necessarily mean an easier question: it may require more work to unpack the subtleties of language, tone and implied meaning. Longer pieces of narrative may be so packed with imagery that a well-chosen selection of details will warrant a high mark without needing to be exhaustive, as long as there is understanding of what they contribute to narrative development. Once again, diligent use of the reading time to consider both questions, and to annotate texts and plan a response will lead to stronger answers. Highlighting and interpreting the more difficult or unusual images or expressions before beginning to write gives much better focus to answers than an approach which 'works it out as you go along'.

This is guidance to encourage centres to make good responses even better. Examiners are sensitive to whatever approach candidates choose to take, and will give patient attention to long and exploratory answers. They often ignore the occasional false note or misreading as marking is not punitive or negative. However, they value answers which are thoughtful, well-constructed, concisely argued and critical. Such answers are more likely to show clarity of understanding and sensitivity of interpretation.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

There were insufficient responses to this question to make meaningful comment.

Question 2

There were insufficient responses to this question to make meaningful comment.