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## FOREWORD

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This booklet contains reports written by Examiners on the work of candidates in certain papers. **Its contents are primarily for the information of the subject teachers concerned.**

# LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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## GCE Ordinary Level

<p>Paper 2010/01</p>
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<p>Paper 1</p>
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### General comments

It was very pleasing that the revised examination syllabus produced such good responses. Though many of the questions were framed in a similar way to those on the previous syllabus, there were some new elements to deal with, such as the optional empathetic questions, and candidates generally took these in their stride, and with some enthusiasm. There was no noticeable difference from previous years in the performance of candidates on the passage-based questions, despite the fact that those questions are no longer broken down into two sections. The empathetic questions proved extremely popular, some candidates choosing to answer more than one of them.

The format of the paper was a little different from that of the previous one and candidates from one or two Centres seemed to have found the rubric difficult to interpret. They were very much in a minority, but there were candidates who seemed to think that they had to answer all three questions on each of their chosen texts and that they had to offer four texts, when in fact only three (covering two genres) are required. This meant that some scripts consisted of sixteen very brief answers, most of which had to be discounted, yielding very low marks in total.

As always, the main reason why some candidates do not perform as well as expected is that they fail to read the questions carefully. Examiners cannot give high reward to answers that do not focus on the task set. In the case of the passage-based questions, this means referring *to the passages*, not regarding them as peripheral - there is still a tendency for some candidates to use the passages as jumping-off points rather than as subjects for close scrutiny. It is vital that candidates take time to consider the questions in detail and to prepare before starting to write.

There was very little evidence of candidates misusing their time. They had obviously benefited from the relaxation of time constraints and generally managed to produce four answers of similar quality.

### Comments on specific questions

Too few candidates answered questions on *Death of a Naturalist*, *Poems Deep and Dangerous*, *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, *The Mosquito Coast*, *Absent Friends*, *Master Harold...and the Boys*, and *An Ideal Husband* to make general comment appropriate.

### **Poetry**

*Touched with Fire* (from Section E) ed. Jack Hydes

A large proportion of candidates had studied these poems and there was no doubting the extent of their knowledge of them. They gave extensive 'glosses' on the relevant poems and quoted freely. There was evidence of too much dependency on handbooks and notes, however, with the same phrases cropping up in answer after answer, sometimes without much relevance to the question. The best answers are always distinguished by freshness of response and the sense that the candidate is working through her or his own interpretations, rather than adopting someone else's ideas.

**Question 7**

The important word in this question was 'wonder' and better answers immediately understood that and focused on the ways in which Wordsworth's language conveys wonder. Weaker answers were full of learnt material about Wordsworth's life and position as one of the Romantic poets and about his interest in nature, and failed to engage with the central thrust of the question. Even those that focused on the language frequently did not go beyond generalisation. This is a typical response: 'In "Composed upon Westminster Bridge" William Wordsworth relishes a spectacle presented before him. He conveys his ideas through this carefully drafted sonnet. Wordsworth's originality and simplicity of diction help in creating a very striking poetic effect and adds to the beauty and sheer wonder of the scene'. These statements were not supported by any precise identification of examples or of their effect, despite the fact that the poem was printed on the paper. Even when various poetic devices were identified, many candidates could not comment on their effect, for example, *Even the river is personified and adds to the overall mood of repose and fulfilment*. How precisely does it do so? Successful answers to poetry questions must examine not only the meaning of the words but the ways in which they work as imagery, and their effects on meaning, feeling and atmosphere.

**Question 8**

Answers to this question tended to adopt a similar approach and the same comments made about **Question 7** are equally applicable. It was not very popular, but those candidates who chose it knew the poems extremely well. *Snake* and *Ode to Autumn* were the popular choices and it was a pity to see candidates who responded sensitively to the poems not scoring higher marks because of a failure to attend to the *sounds* of the words.

**Question 9**

This produced the most successful answers in this section. Candidates seemed to be attuned to the subject and there were some very sensitive and convincing responses, particularly to *Mid-term Break* and *Refugee Mother and Child*. Ironically, these poems are perhaps sparser in imagery than those featured in the other two questions, but candidates seemed to have less difficulty in commenting on the effects of language.

**Prose**

*Twentieth Century Short Stories* ed. Barnes and Eford

**Question 10**

This passage produced some strong and well-supported responses and fewer candidates moved outside it than in some of the other passage-based questions. They generally commented effectively on the monotony and mechanisation of life in the Machine, and were clearly aware of Forster's view-point. Better answers showed how Forster's words condition the responses.

**Question 11**

*Odour of Chrysanthemums* always seems to capture candidates' interest and there were some very thoughtful and balanced responses to this question. The question provided a clear framework but the best answers saw the complexity of Elizabeth's character and the way in which Lawrence shifts our sympathies for her. The details of the story were extremely well known and many candidates used an impressive amount of accurate quotation.

**Question 12**

There were some successful assumptions of the persona of the mate with the terrific whiskers in *The Secret Sharer*, despite the fact that he says relatively little in the story. Even those candidates who had trouble creating an idiosyncratic voice generally made reasonable assumptions about his character and his responses to the young captain.

*Jane Eyre*

**Question 13**

Most candidates focused on the ways in which Jane's character is introduced in this opening section of the novel, on the ways in which she is depicted as an outsider in the Reed household and on her bookishness and interest in nature. Better answers tended to make the point that her independence and resilience are qualities that grow and develop through various adversities in the course of the novel. There were a few comments on the importance of the Reed family, and some better answers considered how the atmosphere is built up and is suggestive of things to come.

#### Question 14

This was a popular question and the material, from the first part of the novel, was well remembered, candidates supporting their answers with a fair degree of accurate detail on the whole. The character and her influence on Jane were appreciated and some of the better answers referred to the far-reaching effects of Helen's stoicism and faith on the adult Jane. Less successful answers merely outlined Helen's appearances in the novel.

#### Question 15

The two favourite choices for this question were Mrs Reed and Mr Brocklehurst. They both drew strongly hostile reactions but were sufficiently vivid as characters for most candidates to be able to remember precise details with which to support their answers.

*The Village By the Sea*

#### Question 16

Most candidates were able to keep to the extract though there was a tendency to rely too much on paraphrase.

#### Question 17

There were too many answers that merely made generalised comments about the situation of women in India and did not focus closely on the text. The question gives a very clear instruction to refer to the writer's method and many candidates ignored this.

#### Question 18

Candidates seemed to find it more difficult to establish a voice for Lila than for Sir Andrew (**Question 48**) and Benjamin (**Question 27**).

*The Grass is Singing*

#### Question 19

Though only a few Centres studied this text, there were some good responses to this question in particular, and here too, candidates showed less inclination to stray outside the passage. Most confined themselves to explaining the situation depicted rather than to exploring the way in which it is written, but there were some sound inferences drawn on the state of the marriage, sometimes supported by reference to how the marriage had come about and the disappointed expectations of both Dick and Mary.

#### Questions 20 and 21

These questions were attempted less successfully and answers tended to consist of over-generalised comments on apartheid. There was some misunderstanding of **Question 21**, some candidates equating Lessing with Mary and writing about Mary's childhood and relationship with her father.

*Fie!a's Child*

#### Question 22

The focus of the question here is on the creation of drama, or, in other words, danger, excitement or tension. Although relatively few candidates attempted it, they generally tried hard to address this, even the weaker answers showing an appreciation of the drama of the situation, the better ones exploring the ways in which the child's viewpoint adds to the tension and the ways in which the surroundings are described.

#### Question 23

This question produced some strong responses on the lines that the theme of racial prejudice is absolutely central to the novel; few, if any, questioned the premise. Most answers focused on the fact that the bringing up of a white child by a black family is anathema to the authorities and is the mainspring for the plot.

### Question 24

Only a few candidates chose to write as Selling, but they generally knew and understood the character and showed an awareness of the effects of his incarceration, informed by what they knew of his behaviour later in the novel.

*Animal Farm*

### Question 25

Many candidates performed disappointingly on this question as they barely referred to the passage in their answers. They were able to write at some length about the service that Boxer has given to the farm and the way in which he is regarded as disposable by the pigs when he comes to the end of his useful working life, and they clearly felt strongly about his treatment, but the question specifically directed them to Orwell's writing and the specific moment and many of them ignored this. Only the best answers looked closely at the passage, commenting on the effect of Benjamin's uncharacteristic volubility, the sinister quality of the sly-looking man in the bowler hat, the pathos of Clover trying to run, and so on. The very best commented on the way that tension is built up through the contrast between silence and feverish activity and on the effect of language such as 'uproar', 'desperation', 'stupid brutes'.

### Question 26

There was some misunderstanding or misreading of this question and a number of candidates merely concentrated on describing what Napoleon does in order to achieve dictatorship, not seeing that the focus is on the gullibility and naivety of the other animals and their inability to take positive action on their own behalf. In a few cases answers became the usual catalogues of how Napoleon breaks and then changes the commandments.

### Question 27

Some excellent, authentic Benjamins emerged here. There was generally a strong sense of engagement with the character and a real attempt to create an appropriately cynical voice. Even the weaker answers understood the character's likely thoughts and feelings at the end of the novel and reflected on how he has always known that things would turn out badly, and on his affection for Boxer.

### Drama

*All My Sons*

Only a few candidates studied this text and most of them chose the passage-based question. Many saw it as an invitation to say what happened next and indulged in a summary of the rest of the play. Even when the question does not specifically have the words 'refer closely to the passage' candidates must be aware that the passage is there for a purpose and must not ignore it completely.

*Romeo and Juliet*

### Question 43

The tendency with this question was for candidates to ignore the word 'here' and to merely reproduce what they had learnt about the three characters from their study of the play as a whole. They therefore commented on Benvolio's role as a peacemaker, for example, which is difficult to support from this passage; and on Mercutio's bawdiness (which *is* supportable here), by reference to the Queen Mab speech.

### Question 44

This was not a popular question and most of those candidate who did attempt it seemed to be somewhat at sea. Instead of exploring the background to the central events, the feud and the general sense of turmoil, fighting servants, the Prince's declarations and so on, they merely told the story of Romeo and Juliet, with some allusion to the difficulties they faced.

**Question 45**

There were some quite effective Romeos, some candidates even attempting a sort of Shakespearian English. The strongest answers went beyond mere outpourings of passion to review the first meetings with Juliet, to perhaps contrast the feelings with those felt for Rosaline, and to make plans for the future.

*Twelfth Night*

**Question 46**

The question clearly refers candidates to the passage ('this scene') but very many seemed to forget that the purpose of a passage-based question is to focus them on a small section of the text in detail and managed to avoid referring to this one at all. There were a few who did what the question required and traced through the passage showing the comedy of Malvolio's obliviousness to the attempts of Sir Toby and his friends to persuade him that he is mad, going on to evaluate the implications of locking him in a darkened room. Most candidates, however, produced what appeared to be previously prepared responses to the character of Malvolio in the whole play, recounting his early contretemps with Sir Toby and the others, even his rudeness to Viola over the ring, and then going on to the Sir Topas episode. Though some of this material was relevant in establishing a response to what is happening to Malvolio here, the marks that could be awarded were limited by lack of reference to the passage.

**Question 47**

This was a very popular question and there were some interesting responses. The best answers were able to balance Orsino's obvious shortcomings with the fact that he is much admired, even by Olivia, and to make the point that Viola is a sufficiently astute judge of character to be capable of seeing through the lovesickness. They also commented on the very obvious rapport that exists between Orsino and Viola almost from the first moment they meet. Despite all this, many candidates did find it hard to accept that Viola should settle for such a man, especially in view of his instantaneous switch from Olivia to her at the end of the play.

**Question 48**

There were a number of very effective responses to this question. Sir Andrew is probably quite a difficult character to empathise with, but many candidates were able to bring out his sensitive side, and an awareness of his folly in trusting Sir Toby. A few, less convincingly, had him vowing revenge, but there was probably some confusion with Malvolio at the end of the play in these cases.