

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 2010/01

Paper 1

General comments

In the Drama section the most popular texts were *The Crucible*, *A Streetcar Named Desire* and, above all, *Macbeth*. In the Poetry Section there was far more work on *Songs of Ourselves* presented than on the Keats selection. In the Prose section, Golding and Lee were by far the most favoured of the authors; by contrast answers on Cross, Dunmore and Hardy were rarely encountered.

Where there was evidence of numbers of candidates seeming to struggle with a task, this usually seemed to be because of a task's asking the candidate to approach the material from a slightly novel angle or being centred on a part of the text which had been studied only very sketchily. However, in the main the tasks produced a body of work which drew often very positive comments from the Examiners. Once again, there seemed to be the impression that the quality was continuing to improve. It is becoming increasingly rare to encounter work which merits very little reward. The overwhelming majority of candidates seemed to have benefited at least to some degree from their reading and most showed some knowledge of the detail of the text. Often there was clear evidence of something very much better than this. In some Centres the quality of work was very high indeed. Candidates answered the question directly and immediately, no longer wasting time by writing preambles doing no more than say what the candidate are going to write about. Very often lively minds were clearly at work, minds which were confident in expressing and supporting an opinion. In the passage-based (asterisked) questions it was rare to encounter work which did not engage to some extent with the detail of the passage. Empathic tasks clearly continue to widen their appeal and once again sometimes provided a spur to an imagination not always evident in the rest of the script. Also, there continues to be a growing realisation that, if they wish to be considered for high reward, candidates are expected to engage with literary language, to show that they can grasp how writers work with words.

Poetry continues to present the greatest challenge to candidates and this was shown on many scripts by the poetry essay receiving the lowest of the three marks. Some candidates simply revealed the 'message' of the poem but even some of those who clearly recognised the need to engage with words did little better, noting figures of speech without proceeding to the point of probing *why* the words in that order were powerful in their effect. Perhaps Centres need to highlight further the importance of words such as *vivid*, *memorable*, *powerful*, *dramatic* in any question. It was not only in their poetry task that candidates regularly ignored the requirement, at least if high reward is to be given, to demonstrate that they have more than a knowledge of theme and character. They need to show themselves as able to respond to the *words* of a text and to analyse why those particular words have so engaged them.

It is pleasing to report that once again there were few rubric infringements.

Comments on specific questions

A Small Family Business

Question 1

This was the most popular question on the play, and there was quite a varied response to it. In a number of instances there were lively reactions to the dark humour; in others it was clear that candidates could cope with what was shocking but could not quite grasp the humorous aspects of the frenetic scene. Some spent far too long in establishing the context when there was so much material available in the extract itself.

Question 2

The very few answers to this were from candidates who largely struggled and found it difficult to locate material.

Question 3

This was popular and there were a number of convincing assumptions of Poppy's character, giving her voice a mixture of astonishment and fascination with what has been revealed, and highlighting her growing attraction to the material offerings of corruption. Some, though, did not quite grasp the revelatory nature of the moment and were disappointingly low key.

A Raisin in the Sun

Question 4

This was quite often efficiently done but in this answer (and in **Question 5**) the response to the *drama* was limited. Some candidates in effect wrote a character sketch of Beneatha with occasional reference to the extract.

Question 5

Most answers here showed some knowledge of the content and were able to draw out just how central the insurance money is to everything. Conversely, very few conveyed the ways in which Hansberry made this vividly dramatic.

Question 6

There were very few answers to this question, and most had difficulty in gauging just how much at this stage Mama would know.

The Crucible

Question 7

This was a very popular task and often done very well. Many candidates relished the many opportunities offered by the passage to engage with the drama and for once probed Miller's language. There were, though, others who did little more than describe, often ignoring dialogue and at best simply quoting stage directions.

Question 8

Examiners found some thoughtful answers here, though not very many fully engaged with her as a dramatic figure. It was slightly surprising to find quite a few incapable of sympathising with her in any way, though, of course, a well argued case was accepted. Others did little more than write a character sketch, ignoring the parameters of the task.

Question 9

Only a few seemed to understand fully what an unpleasant man Miller makes of Parris. Indeed, some gave him the voice and the thoughts of a pious and well meaning pastor with not a hint of the man's cowardly malevolence.

As You Like It

Most Examiners saw little or no work on this play. What there was was usually competent. In **Question 11** some engaged answers were seen and the extract task was usually efficiently done, though few fully revealed the drama of the scene. There were a few effective assumptions of Orlando's character.

Macbeth

Question 13

This question was extremely popular, and there was a great range of achievement in responses to it. A number of candidates dealt well with the ironies in the speeches, bringing out the inferences of what is said, both as to the fear experienced by the speakers and the implications of what was said in regard to Macbeth's future, BUT many missed entirely the irony of the language of the two speakers. Responses also made

very clear the limitations of a considerable number of candidates, even as to a basic grasp of chronology. For example, some thought that Macbeth was not yet king. Quite a few struggled to grasp the veiled nature of the conversation, at times misunderstanding Lennox's meaning and some totally ignored the lord's contribution. It was clear that rather too many candidates were lost once they were asked to probe a scene in which the main protagonists do not appear, however dramatic and significant that scene might be.

Question 14

Like the previous question, this discriminated sharply. Many realised that this task demanded a close knowledge and grasp of the drama of the latter part of the play and that Macbeth was as central to the answer as Lady Macbeth. Many, of course, were more comfortable dealing with the obvious parallels between the statement and the sleepwalking scene but were also able to point to the inexorability of Macbeth's path of violence in the search for security. Conversely, other candidates introduced content of hardly any relevance to the question, describing the events leading up to Duncan's murder. Sometimes even those who did write about the last part of the play did so without making any attempt to communicate the vividness of the drama, just relating what happened.

Question 15

There were some effective assumptions of Macbeth's character which had him in the afterglow of victory and looking forward to the glory that is his. Coupled with this often went some ambitious thoughts. However, some candidates gave far too high a profile for these nascent feelings, ignoring the crucial role of the Witches in bringing them to the forefront of Macbeth's mind. A few read the question so cursorily as to place him after he had met them.

Twelfth Night

Question 16

There were cases where candidates did not score well because they did not read the question sufficiently carefully. These candidates knew what was happening, but did not always address the specific requirement as to the sympathy they felt for Olivia and Viola.

Question 17

There were some excellent responses to the question, but, by contrast, weaker answers did not see Feste's humour or appreciate his wisdom or his laconic wit. Even his songs were too often missed.

Question 18

Relatively few managed to capture Sir Andrew's character effectively. There were some disappointing responses here, suggesting that candidates had not acquired sufficient awareness of his role and personality.

A Streetcar Named Desire

Question 19

This was a very popular question on a very popular text and was often done well. The better answers balanced their answers between the two sisters, bringing out the striking differences of personality shown in the extract by looking closely at the dialogue and action with all its implications for the future. Inevitably the majority of answers tended to concentrate on Blanche, sometimes to the extent of almost ignoring the extract by giving the Examiner a 'prepared' essay on the elder sister.

Question 20

Responses to this task likewise showed how this text seems to encourage candidates to engage naturally in debate. Of course, many strongly deplored Stanley and set out good reasons why an audience should do so. However, there were an encouraging number who could see the world from his point of view and found something with which one could sympathise, especially when juxtaposed with Blanche's make-believe universe.

Question 21

There were some moving assumptions of Stella's character, capturing splendidly her mixture of emotions as she is caught between a rock and a hard place. Some, though, gave insufficient emphasis to the importance of Stanley and the baby in her acceptance that Blanche must go. Also, the voice was at times too much like the melodramatic tones of her sister. Ultimately Stella knows what she wants.

Songs of Ourselves : poems from Part 3

Question 22

This was by far the most popular choice of the questions on the set poems in the anthology. There was some very good work on view. Most answers had at least some concept of the poem's basic meanings. Particularly impressive in some answers was the attention which was given to the gradations of tone in the poem and how those gradations are conveyed in its structure. However, some struggled to achieve a balance between meaning and means. Some answers simply repeated like a mantra that we should live for the present after every reference to the poem; others examined poetic devices with very little reference to the poem's development of meaning. Uncertainty was shown by many candidates when it came to proceeding from the general to the particular as, for example, in the frequency with which 'we drop our youth behind us like a boy' was quoted as an entity, thus spoiling the point of the simile extending into the next line.

Question 23

Most candidates showed some knowledge of their chosen poem but only a minority really focused their answers as required by the question, in other words to approach the poem from a particular angle. There was more evidence of this in 'Plenty', though here quite a few failed to bring out the paradoxical nostalgia for hard times family memories evoke in the poet. There was some very successful work on 'Mid-term Break' in which Heaney's capacity to communicate the family's feelings on that day were delicately caught, but quite often Examiners read a run through of the poem with only the barest nod in the direction of the question.

Question 24

This was the least popular question on the selection. While there was an occasional strikingly successful answer to it, few answers made any attempt to show how simple language can communicate powerfully. It would appear in a number of cases that little time had been devoted to study of the Clough, Tuwhare and Wordsworth poems.

Keats

There was very little work presented on these poems and when it was it was usually in answer to **Question 25**. Sadly little quality work was read. The Examiners found much misreading and at best most candidates sought refuge in regurgitating 'learned' study aid material without a trace of any personal engagement with some of the greatest poetry in English. At worst, Keats was reduced to a drug and alcohol addict.

Things Fall Apart

Question 28

The majority tackled this extract task and at the very least most had relevant things to say. Some looked hard at the detail of the passage and drew out its significances well. However, rather too many produced a 'prepared' essay on the book's main protagonist, only occasionally connecting it to the extract, while others did little more than paraphrase the passage.

Question 29

Some Examiners found impressive, well argued work on this subject, which looked at the full range of possibilities offered by the novel. Some answers did not range widely enough as far as supporting material was concerned, whilst others read what they wanted to read, being sure that Achebe must be presenting the missionaries simply as evil colonialists setting out to destroy a fine way of life.

Question 30

There were some very touching assumptions of Ekwefi's character. It was clearly a part of the novel which encouraged personal engagement, though a few did not read the question carefully enough. They charted the mother's present terror at the prospect of losing her daughter.

Pride and Prejudice

There was not a great deal of work seen on this novel but what there was, mainly on **Question 31**, was at the very least competent, sometimes a good deal more than that. Clearly candidates relished the rich vein of ridicule in the extract and pilloried the reactions of most of the characters, rather unkindly in Charlotte's case, perhaps. Few tackled **Question 32** but some made really quite a convincing attempt to capture Mr Bennet's voice and his chastened state of mind at this point in the novel in **Question 33**.

The God Boy

Far too few responses to this text were seen to make general comment appropriate.

The Siege

This was a 'minority' text which had only a small take up, but there were pockets of worthwhile writing to be found on it. **Question 37** most often featured and candidates who really looked at the detail of the extract and attended to the angle of the task often achieved impressive results, bringing home just how vividly Dunmore conveys the terrors and the dangers of the situation. In **Question 38** some candidates were quite insightful on how Anna and Marina's relationship changes through the novel and just a few were quite touching in their depiction of Levin's thoughts as he journeyed to the front in **Question 39**.

Lord of the Flies

Question 40

The popular passage-based task was a sharp discriminator. At best candidates really probed Golding's writing, bringing out the way the setting and the description of Simon all contribute to the heavy significances of this moment. They grasped both the horror of the description of *The Beast* and poignancy of Simon releasing at last the sad remains of the parachutist. Many were rather less successful, relying on generalities about the past and the immediate future without looking in much detail at the extract. Some were very uncertain of the detail. A few seemed to think that what Simon found was simply a parachute and others were even unable to fix the extract to a particular point in the novel.

Question 41

There were a few impressive answers to this question, bringing out the full range of the part the island plays in the novel. Others were content simply to describe aspects of the island without much evidence that they saw it as more than an inert setting to the action and it was common for answers to be very narrow in the range of the detail used.

Question 42

This was a popular empathic task but the quality of response varied greatly. The best recognised that here the moment is crucial. They conveyed dramatically Ralph's rising desperation and panic and captured his boyish voice as his power evaporates. Unfortunately, rather too many had him in a most unlikely philosophic mood with a voice quite unlike Ralph's, in effect pondering the meaning of the happenings on the island and how he had arrived where he was. Others did little more than narrate the recent events of the novel.

Far from the Madding Crowd

Far too few responses to this text were seen to make general comment appropriate.

To Kill a Mockingbird

Question 46

Most of the work on this extract at least recognised its significance in the novel and brought out the numerous ways in which it illustrated the racism of Maycomb society. Quite a few recognised the need to engage with the writing and to show how Gilmer's quick-fire cross-examination creates such extreme tension

as the duel with Tom develops. Conversely a number failed to engage with the detail of the language, being content to describe and simply assert the drama of the scene. Some spent much time writing generally about the facts of the trial and about Tom Robinson with little reference to the extract and it was not uncommon to find a very uncertain grasp of the basic facts of the scene. For instance, some thought Gilmer was the judge.

Question 47

This popular question was often done well. Many candidates clearly felt very strongly about this despicable man and knew how to support their views with trenchant detail. Others tended to produce a character sketch without reference to the ways in which Lee manipulates the reader, and it was quite common for the range of reference to be somewhat limited.

Question 48

This was the least popular of the tasks on this text and, while there were some character assumptions which captured Dill's quirky nature, quite a few struggled to place him in the moment and to find a convincing voice. Some showed a lack of detailed knowledge, constantly having him return to the Boo Radley escapade.

Into the Wind

Question 49

There was often a great deal of lively identification with Jane Turner's feelings of humiliation in this extract. Various details were held up as evidence of just how distraught she was. However, it was perhaps this close identification with the subject that meant that only a minority really brought out the irony in the writing. It was often noted how the first person created immediacy but Jane's assumptions were rarely treated with the amused scepticism the author intends. Few questioned whether Jane's humiliation was quite as public and whether everyone's interest in her was as great as she assumed it must be. Also, many candidates did not really bring out her growing resentment.

Question 50

The work here was sometimes slightly disappointing. The question seemed to attract rather too many answers which simply tracked through the short story with scant attention to the way the story is crafted to surprise the reader. What was required, but was only sometimes received, was a detailed analysis of the crucial moments in the story, not a general narrative with the occasional reference to moments of surprise.

Question 51

Again, this task produced a varied response. Some caught very well the father's mixture of anger, uncertainty and remorse, sometimes bringing out, for instance, his recognition of what smacking the child might do to his relations with his wife and his awareness of the difficulties which his absence and present lack of work have created. Others much less convincingly simply went down the road of the martinet parent intent on beating some sense into the boy, in one or two cases even to the point of suggesting that he needed some military discipline.