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LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 0475/12
Poetry and Prose

Key messages

In successful responses, candidates:

- focus on the key words of the question
- use relevant textual references to support their responses
- analyse sensitively ways in which writers achieve their effects in extracts and texts
- write informed personal responses to texts.

In less successful responses, candidates:

- work through 'themes' they have studied without a consistent focus on the question
- have only a basic grasp of surface meanings
- make assertions rather analysing specific effects of the writing
- merely label writers' techniques without analysing them.

General comments

There was some evidence of assured work this session especially in relation to **Section A**, where candidates showed insight in their sustained explorations of poems in ways that addressed the questions set.

Many candidates, however, began their answers with general introductions that did not address the question and ended their answers by repeating, sometimes at length, points already made within the main body of the answer. It is worth repeating that there is no merit in producing material that is not relevant to the question nor in repeating points. Extraneous background information is not rewarded. This is an unproductive use of candidates' time.

Textual knowledge

The most successful answers showed an extensive knowledge of the text, with candidates integrating concise textual references to support their ideas. For poetry and extract-based questions, candidates took the opportunity to explore closely the material printed in the question paper. For general essays, successful responses include much direct quotation to support responses, and this enabled candidates to analyse specific ways in which writers achieve their effects. Less successful responses were often characterised by overly assertive comments with little textual reference. Some quotations were excessively long, with the link between quotation and comment often unclear.

Focus on the question's key words

The most successful answers sustained a clear focus on the key words of the question, selecting relevant material. Less successful answers sometimes offered a clear understanding of the text but without achieving a clear focus. In many answers to poetry or extract questions, candidates simply worked through the text in order without careful selection of material that would address the question's key words. Examiners noted there was a sense in which these candidates were prioritising quantity over quality of writing. Many candidates began their answers by announcing a list of themes in the text, giving the impression that the unloading of these was more important to them than addressing the question. Candidates should tailor their material to meet the specific focus of the question; questions are not mere prompts for them to unload everything they know about the text and the themes they have studied.

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Writers' effects

The most successful responses sustained a critical analysis of ways in which writers achieve their effects. Many candidates had memorised an impressive range of direct quotation which enabled them to explore in detail ways the writer's craft. Less successful responses to poetry merely logged features such as enjambment, caesura and anaphora without close analysis of *precise* ways in which poets use these devices to create *specific* effects. Some opening paragraphs included sentences which simply listed in a random way the devices the writer uses.

Personal response

The strongest answers explored with perception a wide range of relevant detail from the texts. Less successful responses offered personal interpretations that were overly assertive, not adequately rooted in the detail of the text. Some candidates offered their own views on themes such as death and freedom; this is not required.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

Strongest answers focused clearly on the question and acknowledged the speaker's thoughts and feelings such as his solitude, his attitude to death and his concerns for his loved ones back home. Strong answers analysed the symbolism of the rain as a cleansing agent and the imagery of 'Like a cold water among broken reeds'. They focused also on the speaker's thoughts about the dead being 'blessed'. Less successful answers worked through the poem without considering the question or provided a retelling of the poem's content. Some of the less successful responses spent too long on general introductions with too many biographical and contextual details.

Question 2

Nearly all candidates grasped the speaker's' amazement and awe at the complexities of a new-born baby and that the 'spirit' is too clumsy to create something so perfect. The strongest answers appreciated the rich language and noted the detailed anatomical imagery, the detached scientific tone and comparisons to nature. They commented on the use of hyperbole and the contrast between the emotions (mentioned towards the end of the poem) and the precision of the baby. A few stronger responses sustained a clear focus on key words 'powerful image', relating this to the unusual use of scientific and medical language and how this was so different from the normal descriptions of babies. Less successful response tended to list features of the baby or log devices used by Stevenson.

Question 3

Most candidates understood the comparison between the waterfall and the passing of time. The most successful answers clearly appreciated the contrast between youthful love and the mature love of old age. These answers explored imagery such as the 'jewelled arc', the 'green darkness', 'bracken spices' and the ultimate 'dark pool', symbolising death. A few candidates were able to tease out the parallels with love and the changes in a relationship over time, rooting their observations in the detail of the poem; they contrasted the early and passionate days of the relationship with the consolations of age. Less successful responses made assertions about the lover leaving or dying, a loss of affection for each other and the speaker's longing for her younger days.

Question 4

Most candidates understood that the speaker was so disgusted with his younger self's 'ruinous folly' in romantic failure, that he wished to kill 'him'. Successful answers appreciated the language features describing the macabre and brutal murder, the speaker's violent emotions and the dark humour. Many of these saw the link to a children's nursery rhyme. Less successful answers focused on the speaker's tone of hatred and self-loathing though without seeing the dark humour. Some worked through the poem and did not consider the question's key words – the 'thoughts and feelings' of the speaker.

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Question 5

There were too few responses seen to make meaningful comment.

Question 6

Successful responses had a clear focus on the jaguar, showing understanding of his fierce desire for freedom and refusal to be tamed by a cage. They contrasted the attitude and behaviour of the jaguar to the other 'fatigued' and 'indolent' animals. Most candidates were able to see the contrast between the jaguar and the other animals in terms of the latter animals' acceptance of their state. More confident answers explored closely Hughes's use of language and structure in creating a sense of violence, aggression and danger. Less successful answers simply worked through the poem, commenting in each animal in turn without tailoring their material to the specific demands of the question.

Section B

Question 7

The more successful responses focused closely on the key word 'disturbing' with a range of supporting points such as Papa's hypocrisy, his humiliation of his daughter and Kambili's anxiety about what Papa might do to her and her classmates. Many of these also commented on Papa's manipulation of Kambili through his account of his difficult childhood. Strong answers explored features of the writing such as the use of the mirror and the significance of Papa speaking Igbo. Most responses acknowledged Papa's dominating the conversation, the tone of his exposition and the portrayal of Kambili's passivity. Less successful answers worked through the extract, using a narrative approach without a clear focus on the question.

Question 8

Most candidates recognised Obiora as a cheerful character, lacking Amaka's resentment of Kambili's family. The most successful responses commented on his taking charge when Papa Nnukwu dies, considering himself the man of the family now. These responses explored ways in which Adichie presents his maturity and his ability to cope with both modern culture and traditional values. Less successful responses were simple character sketches lacking both precise supporting references and a close focus on the key words 'memorable' and 'significant'.

Question 9

There were too few responses seen to make meaningful comment.

Question 10

There were too few responses seen to make meaningful comment.

Question 11

There were too few responses seen to make meaningful comment.

Question 12

There were too few responses seen to make meaningful comment.

Question 13

The more successful responses sustained a clear focus on the question and selected relevant points from the extract, such as the significance of the name, the different approaches of the two cultures to naming a baby and giving birth. The strongest answers, rooted in the text, understood the changed attitude of Ashoke to the train accident from trauma to gratitude, the significance of the missing letter and Mr Wilcox's misunderstanding. Less successful answers lacked focus on the question and on relevant detail in the extract; some digressed into lengthy explanation of the differences in the cultures without linking it to the question or supporting textual detail.

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Question 14

Most candidates understood and commented on Gogol's search for identity. The more successful responses selected clear, relevant supporting examples such as his rebellion as a young adult and the significance of each of his relationships. These responses commented on how the death of his father restored his relationship with Ashima and brought him to an understanding and acceptance of his name and identity. The strongest answers explored the tensions between growing up as an American child and teenager at the same time as keeping Bengali customs. Less successful responses tended to be descriptive or narrative, without achieving a clear focus on the question.

Question 15

There were too few responses seen to make meaningful comment.

Question 16

There were too few responses seen to make meaningful comment.

Question 17

There were too few responses seen to make meaningful comment.

Question 18

There were too few responses seen to make meaningful comment.

Question 19

Many responses showed an awareness of the drama in the extract. Stronger answers placed the extract correctly in context and noted the narrator's shock and horror at the unfolding scene. These responses appreciated the dramatic features such as the thunder, lightning and frightening sounds as well as the vivid descriptions of the Martians. In some scripts, there was a developed response to the way Wells depicts the speed and destructiveness of the Martians and the way tension is built up. The most successful responses considered the perspective of the narrator and the additional drama that this adds to the extract. Less successful answers worked through the extract in an explanatory way without commenting on how the drama is created.

Question 20

There were too few responses seen to make meaningful comment.

Question 21

Nearly all candidates identified some of Dolly's thoughts and feelings, especially her anxiety and nervousness about the ball. Stronger answers dug deeper and commented on her insecurity, the domination of her aunts and the expectations of society, seen from Dolly's perspective. The more successful responses commented on the contrast in her emotions between the start and end of the extract. They recognised how the torn dress symbolised her emotions: just as her dress is ruined, so are her feelings crushed. There was much exploration of the effects unsympathetic language have on Dolly ('how clumsy'). Some less successful responses discussed at length in general terms the demands of the patriarchal society and expectations imposed on women at the time without relating their comments to the detail of the extract printed in the question paper.

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Question 22

Most responses recognised the tower's symbolic qualities and the connection with the overbearing Neville. Many commented on aspects of her ascent of the tower, with the rail missing and then crumpling away and the bat brushing against her face with the sensation that it might be a hand. More successful responses clearly appreciated the disturbing and supernatural elements in the story, with relevant comments about Caroline's troubled state of mind when climbing and descending the tower. They noted the parallels between Caroline's relationship with her husband and climbing the tower, as well as the former tragic events that foreshadow her fate. Less successful responses focused excessively on general assertions about the domination of men and oppression of women without engaging in the details of the story or answering the question.

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LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 0475/22
Drama

Key messages

- The most successful responses addressed the key terms of the question in the introductory paragraph, remained focused and supported ideas with concise quotations which were analysed fully.
- Beginning a response with lengthy comments on the writer's life, works and times, giving plot summaries or listing the writer's techniques to be addressed, is an unproductive way to start an essay. Conclusions need to be more than a reiteration of points.
- An awareness of the text as drama and a personal engagement with the impact of the play onstage are essential in successful responses.
- The maximum mark for each response is 25 so candidates are advised to use their time carefully to avoid being unable to complete the second response.

General comments

It was pleasing to see that the new set texts*, A Streetcar Named Desire* and *A Midsummer's Night Dream* together with *Othello*, were very popular choices. *Death and the King's Horseman* was a less popular text and there were very few responses seen to *Crumbs from the Table of Joy*. Many candidates demonstrated knowledge and enjoyment of their set texts and an engagement with the characters, ideas and themes they contain. The most successful responses showed detailed appreciation of texts, and were aware of the text as performance, commenting on stagecraft, mood and tone, as well as the dramatic impact writers achieved.

With 45 minutes per essay, candidates should use the time wisely and begin to answer the question immediately. Here is no requirement for them to write a thesis statement or to retell the plot before answering the specific question. Some wrote lengthy introductions of extraneous information, or plot summaries, before referring to the question, resulting in a loss of focus on the actual terms of the chosen question. In passage-based questions there were many linear approaches which worked through the passage, explaining what was happening, often failing to reach the end so key points were missed. To avoid this, it is helpful for candidates to write a sentence or two, referencing the question and giving a brief overview of the key points before going on to develop them in the main body of the essay. Textual references which were selected were often over-analysed, resulting in responses which were narrow in range with limited coverage of the passage or text. Listing literary features as a way in which a passage was, for example, 'powerful' or 'shocking', is also an unproductive way to start a response. The selection of the most relevant material and issues to be discussed is an important skill; simply working through a passage or the text without focus on the terms of the question is unlikely to achieve high reward.

An awareness that these texts are written to be performed onstage informed the most successful answers. These responses looked at the text from an audience perspective and commented on author's intentions with regard to the audience and commented in detail on the dramatic impact created. They were aware that, although stage directions inform an actor's performance, an audience is not a reader, so commenting on the punctuation in the stage directions rather than the tone and mood created, seems unproductive.

In discursive questions, the most successful answers covered a range of material from the whole text, supporting points with quotation or very specific textual reference. The ability to integrate brief, well-selected reference to the text is a key discriminator as indicated in the Level Descriptors. Candidates who memorise direct quotations are likely to be better prepared to analyse the ways in which writers achieve their effects (AO3). However, these should be fully explored rather than remain inert or used to support a narrative approach. Similarly, beginning a paragraph with a reference or quotation rather than supporting a point does little to progress an argument effectively.

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On Paper 2, all but a few candidates were clear about the exam requirements and answered one passage-based question and one discursive. The few rubric infringements seen were where candidates answered two passage-based questions. In this case, both essays were marked but only the higher mark awarded. There were many lengthy responses to the first essay resulting in some candidates running out of time on the second essay: an equal amount of time should be spent on both answers if candidates are to achieve marks in the higher levels where well-developed and sustained responses are required to meet the criteria. Candidates are reminded not to refer to line numbers instead of quoting from the text and to remember to label their answers clearly with the question number at the top of the response.

Handwriting was observed to have deteriorated and at times obscured meaning: candidates should endeavour to write legibly and to avoid numerous crossings out which often resulted in a loss of clarity in expression.

Comments on specific questions

LYNN NOTTAGE: *Crumbs from the Table of Joy*

Question 1

(a) The most successful answers focused on the conflict in the passage in their introductions rather than providing a lengthy summary of what had led up to this moment. Establishing the context of a passage is important but it should be provided concisely in one or two sentences to avoid losing focus on the task. Most candidates understood the causes of the conflict with Godfrey's horror at having his stability impacted on by Lily's influence on Ernestine. Lily was blamed for encouraging Ernestine to question some of the racial and social inequalities she witnesses. Lily's and Godfrey's contrasting views and beliefs, particularly regarding communism and religion were explored and supported. Lily's insistence on the right to think and that Ernestine can think for herself featured in these answers. Better answers explored Godfrey's perceived injustice to Lily and Ernestine with the repeated accusations of Lily being at fault and Ernestine having to write an apology to the white teacher. Lily's sarcasm was recognised and understood but a number of candidates became side-tracked into discussing the importance of 'critical thinking' to Lily. Not many candidates commented on the impact of the staging apart from the aggression in Godfrey's '*snatching*' of the essay and the volume and tone of their exchange.

Less successful answers were narrative in approach, lacking close attention to the question or passage. These tended to recount what was said by Godfrey and Lily, without examining the language used or linking points to the conflict between characters. The weakest answers simply retold the plot and parts of the passage with little understanding of the cause of the conflict itself.

(b) The most successful answers not only knew the details of how Gerte and Godfrey met but were able to comment on how Godfrey helps and calms her as well as their mutual loneliness and need for comfort and companionship. Many responses showed good textual knowledge and understanding of their marriage using specific textual detail to support ideas but only the very best were able to show how Nottage portrays the marriage 'movingly'. The difficulties Gerte faces once she is introduced to the family were understood, such as the girls' and Lily's hostility, along with the problems faced in the wider society, with the attack on Godfrey explored in close detail. There were some interesting comments on Gerte, with some scepticism, mirroring the girls' and Lily's, that she does not see colour. Stronger candidates were able to explore the strengthening marriage with Gerte ultimately facilitating Godfrey's growth and independence from Father Devine by her tearing up of his lists and forcing him to choose between her and Lily.

Weaker answers often recounted how Godfrey and Gerte met and how the family reacted to their hasty marriage but with little focus on 'movingly'. The few weakest answers simply retold the play with limited knowledge or understanding of the marriage.

WOLE SOYINKA: *Death and the King's Horseman*

Question 2

(a) There was a wide range of responses to this question with only the most successful candidates demonstrating understanding of the precise context of the passage and, significantly the 'burden' Iyaloja brings to shame Elesin. Some mistakenly thought that Elesin and the audience already

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know of Olunde's death, others spent far too long retelling the earlier marketplace meeting of Iyaloja and Elesin and her earlier warning to him before agreeing to his marriage to his new bride. Most understood Iyaloja's anger and Elesin's shame and his attempts to understand his actions leading to his failure to commit ritual suicide, but very few were able to comment on the 'unnaturalness' of his actions and the significance of reversing the 'cycle of the plantain'. Most candidates recognised Iyaloja's disappointment with Elesin to a greater or lesser extent, but weaker responses struggled with aspects of both characters' language. Better answers analysed language and detail and also examined Elesin's attempts to shift blame elsewhere. Some better answers looked at Iyaloja's hints about the 'burden' though not many picked up on this.

There were many weak responses where candidates retold the plot up to the passage or paraphrased the actual passage with little understanding of the significance of this moment. There was much confusion over Iyaloja's language with candidates commenting that she calls Elesin a 'rat', 'beast' or 'jackal'.

(b) This question produced many of the best answers on this text. All candidates were able to demonstrate some level of knowledge and understanding of Pilkings' character and his feelings about Yoruba customs, commenting on his ignorance and arrogance towards the local people and their beliefs. They went beyond narrative summaries of relevant moments with relevant textual detail to support comments though relatively few engaged with Soyinka's writing. The most successful answers did examine his insensitive, dismissive and superior attitude to any spiritual beliefs in considerable detail, with sensitive response to language. The most popular moments referred to were the ball and the wearing of the Egungun costumes and Pilkings' desire to win the fancy dress and impress the Prince, demonstrating his total ignorance of and contempt towards the traditions. Candidates often included the quotations '*mumbo jumbo*' and '*nonsense*' but used them narratively without attempting to respond to the tone. A few stronger responses did demonstrate understanding of how his ignorance of Yoruba beliefs about death and the afterlife lead to Olunde's death.

Less successful responses were largely general and repetitive, commenting on Pilkings' superiority complex and his lack of interest in cultures other than his own, mainly asserting these points rather than supporting and developing an argument. Some candidates spent too long discussing the damage caused by colonisation rather than focusing on Soyinka's writing.

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: *A Streetcar Named Desire*

Question 3

(a) It was pleasing to see that this new text was very popular this series and there were many excellent answers seen. Candidates who focused on the key word 'shocking' inevitably produced stronger responses than those who worked through the passage, retelling what was happening. Candidates generally engaged effectively with the characters and text, not only analysing the detail and language of Stanley's revelations and Stella's responses, but looking at the relevance of the song Blanche is singing in the background and her ignorance of what is going on as she sings in the bath. The most successful responses covered the passage thoroughly, exploring Stanley's sarcastic, unforgiving language and his delight in exposing Blanche's past. There was much focus on '*Dame Blanche*' and her '*lily-white*' fingers, on Stanley's exclamation, '*Boy oh boy!*', and his description of Blanche as '*loco-nuts*'.

The pleasure Stanley takes in his revelations and the shocking effect on Stella seen in her strong physical reaction '*This is making me-sick*!' and her initial refusal to believe Stanley, was explored in detail. The symbolism of Blanche cleansing herself of past sins was focused on, as was the irony of the words of the song, '*Just as phony as can be*'. There was much focus on language and personal engagement with the character of Blanche, a mixture of sympathy and disgust. The best responses recognised how the audience and Stella are shocked but perhaps for different reasons: the more perceptive responses argued that the audience should have anticipated some of Blanche's history as they know of her earlier drinking and kissing of the young man, whereas Stella's shock is that of the sister who feels betrayed as well as appalled by her husband's revelations.

Weaker answers understood that Stanley is destroying Blanche's façade, without looking at his revelations in any detail, or Stella's response. They lacked detailed textual support and range but were able to present personal responses to the characters even though they often lacked understanding of the subtleties of this moment in the play. Some responses outlined the plot of the

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play in great detail, wasting time which could have been spent analysing the passage. Others suggested that Blanche is fully aware of what is happening, and argued that she is deliberately singing to drown out Stanley's revelations.

(b) Successful responses showed impressive knowledge of the text, with well-selected textual references from across the play being used to explore the relationship. Empathy with both characters was shown and there was often evidence of a sensitive understanding of the characters' need to ease their loneliness. Most candidates were able to describe the sequence of events in their relationship but only the most successful responses focused on the precise wording of the question, their 'feelings … for each other'. Candidates clearly understood their mutual need, especially Blanche's need for support and 'shelter' but few really understood Mitch's low opinion of himself and his sense of being flattered by her flirting. Some mistakenly felt that he wants her to move in and help him look after his mother, instead of Blanche 'replacing' the companionship that he would miss after his mother died. Most knew and were able to comment on Blanche's fear of her age being discovered and her use of the paper lanterns and meeting in the evenings; stronger responses knew and explored the significance of how the polka music fades away after his proposal and how the strength of Mitch's feelings are conveyed by his extreme anger and violence towards Stanley shouting '*I'll kill you!*' and the pathos created by Williams when Mitch is described as '*collaps[ed] at the table, sobbing*' as Blanche is led away.

Weaker responses were less successful in understanding Blanche's reasons for wanting to marry Mitch, stating simplistically that she is madly in love with him and not showing awareness of the fact that she wants support and protection.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *A Midsummer's Night Dream*

Question 4

(a) Although candidates clearly knew the text, many responses to this question were surprisingly weak and candidates struggled to engage successfully with this passage. Many responses were often general, lacking sufficient textual support and often drifted into general discussion of the theme of love, ignoring the context of the passage, that the couple are escaping Hermia's terrible choice inflicted on her by her father, of death or life as a nun. Many responses quoted the '*sharp Athenian law*', but with no explanation of how this law has impacted Hermia and Lysander. There were many explanatory responses with attempts to explain the language, but understanding was often insecure.

The more successful responses were able to contextualise the passage concisely and to link this moment to how Lysander's confidence in his plans for their elopement go wrong due the ironic reversals caused by the love potion and events in the woods. Successful responses explored the impact of the poetry of their paired and patterned early declarations, exploring just how the melodramatic imagery and classical references make their declarations of mutual love memorable in their sincerity.

Weaker responses retold the plot and paraphrased this moment with very little attempt to address the key term of the question, 'memorable'. Too many spent a long time establishing the context and explaining what has just happened rather than commenting on the writing and the ways Shakespeare achieves effects. They understood Lysander and Hermia's love and almost all quoted 'The course of true love…' without always commenting on its significance.

(b) There was a full range of responses to this question though many candidates relied solely on the love potion and its importance and retold the plot or scenes that involved its use and its consequences. The most successful responses commented on the darker side of magic and explored the impact of magic on the mortal world and the different atmospheres in the two worlds. They commented on Oberon's deception and manipulation of Titania to get his own way. Stronger responses engaged with the idea that magic provides escapism for the audience and explored a range of textual detail, including the ending, when Oberon says the misunderstandings '*shall seem a dream and fruitless visions*'. They show appreciation of the visual impact of Bottom's ears and the humour of seeing Titania caress him, with some also exploring the cruelty of her humiliation. There were some successful responses which understood that magic not only creates the problems but it also resolves them and creates a happy ending as Demetrius is left under its spell at the end still in love with Helena; one or two even commented on the fact that the tale of Pyramus and Thisbe shows what happened when there was no magic to 'save' the lovers: a tragic ending. It was also

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noted that the fact that the magic used on Demetrius was not reversed indicates his love for Helena could be said to be false.

Weaker responses included general statements that magic causes chaos and confusion. Events involving magic were often narrated, and the behaviour of characters was commented on, such as the fact that Puck is mischievous in his use of magic and Oberon is controlling, but with little textual support or development. Responses often drifted into discussion of the theme of love instead. There was also a lot of assertion that magic creates humour but with little attempt to explore how and why it is funny for the audience.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Othello*

Question 5

(a) This was a popular question, and some perceptive responses were seen. These integrated well-selected textual references and worked carefully through the passage, resulting in detailed exploration of the characters. A few candidates spent too much time establishing the context of the moment, with some weaker responses suggesting that this was the first time that Desdemona has declared her love or that they want permission to marry. Most, however, recognised the strength of their love for each other. Stronger responses demonstrated understanding of Desdemona's determination to travel with Othello to Cyprus and also her consideration for her father. Othello's sense of duty and determination to not be distracted by Desdemona was observed, as was the significance and irony of Brabantio's warning, '*She has deceived her father and may thee.*'

Better answers examined not only the love shown but what her way of expressing it in court shows about Desdemona. They also commented on how the impressions of Othello in how he speaks, and how others speak of him, directly contradicts what Iago has previously stated. The Duke's respect for Othello and his remark that he is '*far more fair than black*' was often discussed. Stronger responses were able to go beyond asserting the irony in Othello's description of Iago as '*a man of honesty and trust*', understood the dramatic irony, and perceptively explored how in this moment Iago is once again being a silent observer, making interesting comparisons with how earlier in the play he was in the shadows while Roderigo was making himself known to Brabantio – all this reinforcing his character as the 'puppeteer' who plays his victims. Better answers looked at the portrayal of the other characters and also made relevant, brief links to later events in the play.

Less successful answers merely paraphrased the passage and what was happening without much attempt to explore how Shakespeare's writing 'strikingly portrayed' the characters themselves. These tended to focus on Desdemona and Othello's love for each other, often looking at other characters briefly, or not at all. Some candidates struggled to understand the language of the passage, particularly in Othello's long speech, with much misinterpretation evident, particularly of his comments about his sense of duty not being impacted by his desire for Desdemona. Many candidates mistakenly believed that Desdemona is actually going to war, and some missed the context of war entirely, believing that the characters are still discussing the circumstances of Othello and Desdemona's relationship and elopement.

(b) There were fewer responses to this question, but most engaged and sympathised with the character of Emilia, addressing the question with varying degrees of success. The most successful answers focused on 'To what extent', without losing sight of Emilia and considered other contributory factors, in a balanced response. Most responses commented on the significance of the handkerchief and how Emilia's eagerness to please her husband, by giving it to him, makes her unintentionally to blame for Desdemona's death. Better answers looked at her role as a catalyst leading to Desdemona's murder by her taking the handkerchief (with many saying she had stolen it), rather than returning it to her mistress, whilst also acknowledging that she was unaware of why Iago wants it. Some unconvincing answers stated that she was not at all to blame. Stronger responses that referenced her conversation with Desdemona about wives being faithful and what she would do to help her husband were able to use this to suggest that her worldliness should have made her question why Iago was so keen to get hold of the handkerchief.

Less successful responses soon drifted away from Emilia, focusing largely on Iago's culpability, but still with some relevance to the question. Others incorrectly thought that she is aware of Iago's plot from early on but does not share her knowledge and so is largely to blame for Desdemona's death. Weaker answers tended not to consider 'to what extent' at all, with a few candidates getting side tracked by suggestions that her earlier life was one of abuse and that her submissive relationship

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with Iago was a result of this. These responses used little textual support and retold the few moments of her finding the handkerchief, her waiting too long outside the locked door before trying to get into the bed chamber, and her final moments where she declares Desdemona's innocence before being killed by Iago.

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LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 0475/32
Drama (Open Text)

Key messages

- The most successful responses addressed the key terms of the question in the introductory paragraph, remained focused and supported ideas with concise quotations which were analysed fully.
- Beginning a response with lengthy comments on the writer's life, works and times, giving plot summaries or listing the writer's techniques to be addressed, is an unproductive way to start an essay. Conclusions need to be more than a reiteration of points.
- An awareness of the text as drama and a personal engagement with the impact of the play onstage are essential in successful responses.

General comments

It was pleasing to see that the new set texts*, A Streetcar Named Desire* and *A Midsummer's Night Dream* together with *Othello*, were very popular choices. *Death and the King's Horseman* was a less popular text and there were very few responses seen to *Crumbs from the Table of Joy*. Many candidates demonstrated knowledge and enjoyment of their set texts and an engagement with the characters, ideas and themes they contain. The most successful responses showed detailed appreciation of texts, and were aware of the text as performance, commenting on stagecraft, mood and tone, as well as the dramatic impact writers achieved.

With 45 minutes per essay, candidates should use the time wisely and begin to answer the question immediately. Here is no requirement for them to write a thesis statement or to retell the plot before answering the specific question. Some wrote lengthy introductions of extraneous information, or plot summaries, before referring to the question, resulting in a loss of focus on the actual terms of the chosen question. In passage-based questions there were many linear approaches which worked through the passage, explaining what was happening, often failing to reach the end so key points were missed. To avoid this, it is helpful for candidates to write a sentence or two, referencing the question and giving a brief overview of the key points before going on to develop them in the main body of the essay. Textual references which were selected were often over-analysed, resulting in responses which were narrow in range with limited coverage of the passage or text. Listing literary features as a way in which a passage was, for example, 'powerful' or 'shocking', is also an unproductive way to start a response. The selection of the most relevant material and issues to be discussed is an important skill; simply working through a passage or the text without focus on the terms of the question is unlikely to achieve high reward.

An awareness that these texts are written to be performed onstage informed the most successful answers. These responses looked at the text from an audience perspective and commented on author's intentions with regard to the audience and commented in detail on the dramatic impact created. They were aware that, although stage directions inform an actor's performance, an audience is not a reader, so commenting on the punctuation in the stage directions rather than the tone and mood created, seems unproductive.

In discursive questions, the most successful answers covered a range of material from the whole text, supporting points with quotation or very specific textual reference. The ability to integrate brief, well-selected reference to the text is a key discriminator as indicated in the Level Descriptors. Candidates who memorise direct quotations are likely to be better prepared to analyse the ways in which writers achieve their effects (AO3). However, these should be fully explored rather than remain inert or used to support a narrative approach. Similarly, beginning a paragraph with a reference or quotation rather than supporting a point does little to progress an argument effectively. Candidates are reminded not to refer to line numbers instead of quoting from the text and to remember to label their answers clearly with the question number at the top of the response.

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Handwriting was observed to have deteriorated and at times obscured meaning: candidates should endeavour to write legibly and to avoid numerous crossings out which often resulted in a loss of clarity in expression.

Comments on specific questions

LYNN NOTTAGE: *Crumbs from the Table of Joy*

Question 1

(a) The most successful answers focused on the conflict in the passage in their introductions rather than providing a lengthy summary of what had led up to this moment. Establishing the context of a passage is important but it should be provided concisely in one or two sentences to avoid losing focus on the task. Most candidates understood the causes of the conflict with Godfrey's horror at having his stability impacted on by Lily's influence on Ernestine. Lily was blamed for encouraging Ernestine to question some of the racial and social inequalities she witnesses. Lily's and Godfrey's contrasting views and beliefs, particularly regarding communism and religion were explored and supported. Lily's insistence on the right to think and that Ernestine can think for herself featured in these answers. Better answers explored Godfrey's perceived injustice to Lily and Ernestine with the repeated accusations of Lily being at fault and Ernestine having to write an apology to the white teacher. Lily's sarcasm was recognised and understood but a number of candidates became side-tracked into discussing the importance of 'critical thinking' to Lily. Not many candidates commented on the impact of the staging apart from the aggression in Godfrey's '*snatching*' of the essay and the volume and tone of their exchange.

Less successful answers were narrative in approach, lacking close attention to the question or passage. These tended to recount what was said by Godfrey and Lily, without examining the language used or linking points to the conflict between characters. The weakest answers simply retold the plot and parts of the passage with little understanding of the cause of the conflict itself.

(b) The most successful answers not only knew the details of how Gerte and Godfrey met but were able to comment on how Godfrey helps and calms her as well as their mutual loneliness and need for comfort and companionship. Many responses showed good textual knowledge and understanding of their marriage using specific textual detail to support ideas but only the very best were able to show how Nottage portrays the marriage 'movingly'. The difficulties Gerte faces once she is introduced to the family were understood, such as the girls' and Lily's hostility, along with the problems faced in the wider society, with the attack on Godfrey explored in close detail. There were some interesting comments on Gerte, with some scepticism, mirroring the girls' and Lily's, that she does not see colour. Stronger candidates were able to explore the strengthening marriage with Gerte ultimately facilitating Godfrey's growth and independence from Father Devine by her tearing up of his lists and forcing him to choose between her and Lily.

Weaker answers often recounted how Godfrey and Gerte met and how the family reacted to their hasty marriage but with little focus on 'movingly'. The few weakest answers simply retold the play with limited knowledge or understanding of the marriage.

WOLE SOYINKA: *Death and the King's Horseman*

Question 2

(a) There was a wide range of responses to this question with only the most successful candidates demonstrating understanding of the precise context of the passage and, significantly the 'burden' Iyaloja brings to shame Elesin. Some mistakenly thought that Elesin and the audience already know of Olunde's death, others spent far too long retelling the earlier marketplace meeting of Iyaloja and Elesin and her earlier warning to him before agreeing to his marriage to his new bride. Most understood Iyaloja's anger and Elesin's shame and his attempts to understand his actions leading to his failure to commit ritual suicide, but very few were able to comment on the 'unnaturalness' of his actions and the significance of reversing the 'cycle of the plantain'. Most candidates recognised Iyaloja's disappointment with Elesin to a greater or lesser extent, but weaker responses struggled with aspects of both characters' language. Better answers analysed language and detail and also examined Elesin's attempts to shift blame elsewhere. Some better answers looked at Iyaloja's hints about the 'burden' though not many picked up on this.

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There were many weak responses where candidates retold the plot up to the passage or paraphrased the actual passage with little understanding of the significance of this moment. There was much confusion over Iyaloja's language with candidates commenting that she calls Elesin a 'rat', 'beast' or 'jackal'.

(b) This question produced many of the best answers on this text. All candidates were able to demonstrate some level of knowledge and understanding of Pilkings' character and his feelings about Yoruba customs, commenting on his ignorance and arrogance towards the local people and their beliefs. They went beyond narrative summaries of relevant moments with relevant textual detail to support comments though relatively few engaged with Soyinka's writing. The most successful answers did examine his insensitive, dismissive and superior attitude to any spiritual beliefs in considerable detail, with sensitive response to language. The most popular moments referred to were the ball and the wearing of the Egungun costumes and Pilkings' desire to win the fancy dress and impress the Prince, demonstrating his total ignorance of and contempt towards the traditions. Candidates often included the quotations '*mumbo jumbo*' and '*nonsense*' but used them narratively without attempting to respond to the tone. A few stronger responses did demonstrate understanding of how his ignorance of Yoruba beliefs about death and the afterlife lead to Olunde's death.

Less successful responses were largely general and repetitive, commenting on Pilkings' superiority complex and his lack of interest in cultures other than his own, mainly asserting these points rather than supporting and developing an argument. Some candidates spent too long discussing the damage caused by colonisation rather than focusing on Soyinka's writing.

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: *A Streetcar Named Desire*

Question 3

(a) It was pleasing to see that this new text was very popular this series and there were many excellent answers seen. Candidates who focused on the key word 'shocking' inevitably produced stronger responses than those who worked through the passage, retelling what was happening. Candidates generally engaged effectively with the characters and text, not only analysing the detail and language of Stanley's revelations and Stella's responses, but looking at the relevance of the song Blanche is singing in the background and her ignorance of what is going on as she sings in the bath. The most successful responses covered the passage thoroughly, exploring Stanley's sarcastic, unforgiving language and his delight in exposing Blanche's past. There was much focus on '*Dame Blanche*' and her '*lily-white*' fingers, on Stanley's exclamation, '*Boy oh boy!*', and his description of Blanche as '*loco-nuts*'.

The pleasure Stanley takes in his revelations and the shocking effect on Stella seen in her strong physical reaction '*This is making me-sick*!' and her initial refusal to believe Stanley, was explored in detail. The symbolism of Blanche cleansing herself of past sins was focused on, as was the irony of the words of the song, '*Just as phony as can be*'. There was much focus on language and personal engagement with the character of Blanche, a mixture of sympathy and disgust. The best responses recognised how the audience and Stella are shocked but perhaps for different reasons: the more perceptive responses argued that the audience should have anticipated some of Blanche's history as they know of her earlier drinking and kissing of the young man, whereas Stella's shock is that of the sister who feels betrayed as well as appalled by her husband's revelations.

Weaker answers understood that Stanley is destroying Blanche's façade, without looking at his revelations in any detail, or Stella's response. They lacked detailed textual support and range but were able to present personal responses to the characters even though they often lacked understanding of the subtleties of this moment in the play. Some responses outlined the plot of the play in great detail, wasting time which could have been spent analysing the passage. Others suggested that Blanche is fully aware of what is happening, and argued that she is deliberately singing to drown out Stanley's revelations.

(b) Successful responses showed impressive knowledge of the text, with well-selected textual references from across the play being used to explore the relationship. Empathy with both characters was shown and there was often evidence of a sensitive understanding of the characters' need to ease their loneliness. Most candidates were able to describe the sequence of events in their relationship but only the most successful responses focused on the precise wording of the question, their 'feelings … for each other'. Candidates clearly understood their mutual need,

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especially Blanche's need for support and 'shelter' but few really understood Mitch's low opinion of himself and his sense of being flattered by her flirting. Some mistakenly felt that he wants her to move in and help him look after his mother, instead of Blanche 'replacing' the companionship that he would miss after his mother died. Most knew and were able to comment on Blanche's fear of her age being discovered and her use of the paper lanterns and meeting in the evenings; stronger responses knew and explored the significance of how the polka music fades away after his proposal and how the strength of Mitch's feelings are conveyed by his extreme anger and violence towards Stanley shouting '*I'll kill you!*' and the pathos created by Williams when Mitch is described as '*collaps[ed] at the table, sobbing*' as Blanche is led away.

Weaker responses were less successful in understanding Blanche's reasons for wanting to marry Mitch, stating simplistically that she is madly in love with him and not showing awareness of the fact that she wants support and protection.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *A Midsummer's Night Dream*

Question 4

(a) Although candidates clearly knew the text, many responses to this question were surprisingly weak and candidates struggled to engage successfully with this passage. Many responses were often general, lacking sufficient textual support and often drifted into general discussion of the theme of love, ignoring the context of the passage, that the couple are escaping Hermia's terrible choice inflicted on her by her father, of death or life as a nun. Many responses quoted the '*sharp Athenian law*', but with no explanation of how this law has impacted Hermia and Lysander. There were many explanatory responses with attempts to explain the language, but understanding was often insecure.

The more successful responses were able to contextualise the passage concisely and to link this moment to how Lysander's confidence in his plans for their elopement go wrong due the ironic reversals caused by the love potion and events in the woods. Successful responses explored the impact of the poetry of their paired and patterned early declarations, exploring just how the melodramatic imagery and classical references make their declarations of mutual love memorable in their sincerity.

Weaker responses retold the plot and paraphrased this moment with very little attempt to address the key term of the question, 'memorable'. Too many spent a long time establishing the context and explaining what has just happened rather than commenting on the writing and the ways Shakespeare achieves effects. They understood Lysander and Hermia's love and almost all quoted 'The course of true love…' without always commenting on its significance.

(b) There was a full range of responses to this question though many candidates relied solely on the love potion and its importance and retold the plot or scenes that involved its use and its consequences. The most successful responses commented on the darker side of magic and explored the impact of magic on the mortal world and the different atmospheres in the two worlds. They commented on Oberon's deception and manipulation of Titania to get his own way. Stronger responses engaged with the idea that magic provides escapism for the audience and explored a range of textual detail, including the ending, when Oberon says the misunderstandings '*shall seem a dream and fruitless visions*'. They show appreciation of the visual impact of Bottom's ears and the humour of seeing Titania caress him, with some also exploring the cruelty of her humiliation. There were some successful responses which understood that magic not only creates the problems but it also resolves them and creates a happy ending as Demetrius is left under its spell at the end still in love with Helena; one or two even commented on the fact that the tale of Pyramus and Thisbe shows what happened when there was no magic to 'save' the lovers: a tragic ending. It was also noted that the fact that the magic used on Demetrius was not reversed indicates his love for Helena could be said to be false.

Weaker responses included general statements that magic causes chaos and confusion. Events involving magic were often narrated, and the behaviour of characters was commented on, such as the fact that Puck is mischievous in his use of magic and Oberon is controlling, but with little textual support or development. Responses often drifted into discussion of the theme of love instead. There was also a lot of assertion that magic creates humour but with little attempt to explore how and why it is funny for the audience.

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WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Othello*

Question 5

(a) This was a popular question, and some perceptive responses were seen. These integrated well-selected textual references and worked carefully through the passage, resulting in detailed exploration of the characters. A few candidates spent too much time establishing the context of the moment, with some weaker responses suggesting that this was the first time that Desdemona has declared her love or that they want permission to marry. Most, however, recognised the strength of their love for each other. Stronger responses demonstrated understanding of Desdemona's determination to travel with Othello to Cyprus and also her consideration for her father. Othello's sense of duty and determination to not be distracted by Desdemona was observed, as was the significance and irony of Brabantio's warning, '*She has deceived her father and may thee.*'

Better answers examined not only the love shown but what her way of expressing it in court shows about Desdemona. They also commented on how the impressions of Othello in how he speaks, and how others speak of him, directly contradicts what Iago has previously stated. The Duke's respect for Othello and his remark that he is '*far more fair than black*' was often discussed. Stronger responses were able to go beyond asserting the irony in Othello's description of Iago as '*a man of honesty and trust*', understood the dramatic irony, and perceptively explored how in this moment Iago is once again being a silent observer, making interesting comparisons with how earlier in the play he was in the shadows while Roderigo was making himself known to Brabantio – all this reinforcing his character as the 'puppeteer' who plays his victims. Better answers looked at the portrayal of the other characters and also made relevant, brief links to later events in the play.

Less successful answers merely paraphrased the passage and what was happening without much attempt to explore how Shakespeare's writing 'strikingly portrayed' the characters themselves. These tended to focus on Desdemona and Othello's love for each other, often looking at other characters briefly, or not at all. Some candidates struggled to understand the language of the passage, particularly in Othello's long speech, with much misinterpretation evident, particularly of his comments about his sense of duty not being impacted by his desire for Desdemona. Many candidates mistakenly believed that Desdemona is actually going to war, and some missed the context of war entirely, believing that the characters are still discussing the circumstances of Othello and Desdemona's relationship and elopement.

(b) There were fewer responses to this question, but most engaged and sympathised with the character of Emilia, addressing the question with varying degrees of success. The most successful answers focused on 'To what extent', without losing sight of Emilia and considered other contributory factors, in a balanced response. Most responses commented on the significance of the handkerchief and how Emilia's eagerness to please her husband, by giving it to him, makes her unintentionally to blame for Desdemona's death. Better answers looked at her role as a catalyst leading to Desdemona's murder by her taking the handkerchief (with many saying she had stolen it), rather than returning it to her mistress, whilst also acknowledging that she was unaware of why Iago wants it. Some unconvincing answers stated that she was not at all to blame. Stronger responses that referenced her conversation with Desdemona about wives being faithful and what she would do to help her husband were able to use this to suggest that her worldliness should have made her question why Iago was so keen to get hold of the handkerchief.

Less successful responses soon drifted away from Emilia, focusing largely on Iago's culpability, but still with some relevance to the question. Others incorrectly thought that she is aware of Iago's plot from early on but does not share her knowledge and so is largely to blame for Desdemona's death. Weaker answers tended not to consider 'to what extent' at all, with a few candidates getting side tracked by suggestions that her earlier life was one of abuse and that her submissive relationship with Iago was a result of this. These responses used little textual support and retold the few moments of her finding the handkerchief, her waiting too long outside the locked door before trying to get into the bed chamber, and her final moments where she declares Desdemona's innocence before being killed by Iago.

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LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 0475/42
Unseen

Key messages

- Most candidates read the text with careful attention to detail using quotation to support an interpretation
- Candidates are good at identifying the techniques writers use but need to comment in more detail on their effect on the reader
- Candidates were often better at dealing with earlier parts of the texts than the final section
- The strongest answers respond in considerable detail to figurative language and evaluate the overall impact of the text.

General comments

This session again produced some very strong responses to both poetry and prose, although prose answers were often relatively weak, as candidates tend to retell the narrative instead of considering the purpose and impact of the writing. Candidates should be encouraged to take a more analytical approach to prose passages in their exam preparation, exploring figurative language and emotive effects in the same way as they more readily do when analysing poetry. More consideration of the writer's choices, not least their choice of narrative voice and perspective, would also lead to higher levels of critical response.

Misunderstandings were rare, as both texts had a very clear surface narrative which immediately engaged candidates' interest. Stronger responses were distinguished by sensitive attention to the ways in which writers use language to engage the reader's emotional engagement in the situations described. In this session, both texts had a distinctive first-person narrative voice, and critical understanding required appreciation of how readers are encouraged to share the narrator or speaker's perspective and follow the development of their thoughts and feelings.

AO1 Knowledge of the text should be supported by frequent reference to details of the text, and most candidates used brief quotation well to illustrate their arguments about the meaning of the text. Many explored the writer's use of pronouns to understand not just who the speakers and narrators were, but also who they might be addressing or their relationship to others mentioned in the text. AO2 expects, at a higher level, understanding of the deeper implications of the text, such as the kind of emotions that are portrayed. It encourages candidates to look beyond surface meaning and explore the implicit emotions conveyed through the speaker or narrator's language and how they portray others in the text. At the highest levels, this is critical understanding, which implies appreciation of the writer's conscious crafting of the text for impact on the reader, looking at characters and their emotions as constructs to explore human behaviour and reactions when under pressure. The best responses show real understanding of the writer at work, shaping the reader's response and inviting wider reflections beyond the literal situation. Strong scripts usually announce themselves at once, with an introduction that does not simply repeat the question and bullet points followed by a list of literary terms, but communicates a critical overview of the whole text, why the writer wrote it and what effect it is intended to have on the reader.

Candidates sometimes appear to think that AO3 (the writer's effects) is about identification of literary terms. Terms such as hyperbole, enjambment, anaphora, caesura, metaphor and personification were used frequently, but not always with understanding or followed by a clear explanation of their effects. There was also a lot less technical analysis of prose writing. A single-minded focus on features of the writing can risk losing sight of the text as a whole. The single-minded focus on language features often led to a lack of attention to the question and little evidence of understanding the impact of the text as a whole. Precise naming of terms is not necessary for a higher-level mark, and candidates who identify literary techniques correctly may not actually show understanding of the text. It is much more important to show understanding of how imagery, form, description and dialogue make an impression on the reader, and develop their emotional understanding of the situation and its significance.

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The bullet points are intended to help candidates to pay attention to the Assessment Objectives of the subject and assist them in structuring their responses, timing their answers and paragraphing effectively. The third bullet point often makes reference to the final section of the poem, or the impact of the final part of the prose passage. The last section of a poem or passage is often intended to make a lingering impression on the reader and encourage them to evaluate the experience that has just been described. It is therefore disappointing when candidates rush the final section of their response, as critical reflection on their reading is essential for access to the higher levels in the mark scheme. Candidates should be encouraged to divide a text into three sections, and structure their own response to it in this way, keeping an eye on the clock in timed practice. The best responses are not necessarily the most exhaustive and detailed but have the most thoughtful reflection on the writer's purpose and the methods they use to communicate those ideas to the reader. The strongest answers make a selection of perceptive insights into detail, and a convincing overall interpretation of why these matter, by developing the reader's understanding and emotional engagement.

Some candidates still think that AO4 Personal Response requires them to make comparisons with other texts they have read or reflect on their own life experiences in order to make a connection with the emotions expressed by the writer. Although this kind of reflection is often interesting to read, it is not part of what examiners are assessing, nor are they looking for an interpretation of some kind of general moral message communicated by the writing. By personal response, examiners mean individuality of interpretation of the literary qualities of the text, and how its language engages the emotions of the reader. Stronger answers will demonstrate a critical understanding of the writer's purpose in constructing the speaker's voice in a poem, or the perspective of the narrator in a prose passage. Candidates could practise writing effective conclusions which sum up the overall effect of devices they have noticed on the reader.

Teachers clearly prepare their candidates very well for this paper, and rightly see it as an opportunity for them to demonstrate the literary critical skills they have developed throughout the course. There are many past papers, and past examiners' reports on the School Support Hub, to assist preparation and practice. It is especially important to see how writers use language and narrative viewpoint to manipulate readers' feelings in prose as well as poetry.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

The poem 'Empty Nest' by Carol Ann Duffy, a British former Poet Laureate proved a very popular choice among candidates. Many were able to make a personal connection with the emotions expressed, as they understood what it was like to leave home in order to study, either for school or university. Stronger responses needed to show empathy for the feelings of the mother, and how the poet expresses her sentiments through imagery, language and form.

Most candidates realised the importance of the poem's title, and how it is echoed both in the phrase about any 'bird who grieves/over its empty nest' in the first stanza, and in repeated references to the natural world throughout the poem. Many appreciated that the 'nest' is the family home, and some pointed out that this home becomes merely a 'house' when the daughter has gone. A good number of responses noticed that the poem begins by a direct address to the 'dear child', as if the poet were writing a letter. Some followed this up by commenting on the intimacy of the poem, and its concern for personal space and personal emotions; a few followed this up by considering how the daughter is deliberately invoked in the poem – 'your vacant room'' 'you come and go' – and although she is a less overt presence later in the poem, some found the direct address a reason why the mother's grief is a 'shy sorrow' which she struggles to make explicit, and several pointed out that the poem reads like a letter that was never completed or never sent.

Many candidates wanted to comment on the structure of the poem, while realising that it was far from regular. Some interpreted this as a sign of the mother's loss of control, but others noted that poetic control kept reasserting itself through half-rhymes ('leave/grieves', 'branch/bench'), internal sound effects ('hefts/Heavier', 'know/sorrow/piano', 'bells/spelling) and a concluding rhyming couplet. It would therefore not be correct to say that the poem is free verse, and indeed its subject seems to be continuing attachment, not freedom. It was more unusual for candidates to observe that the poem is divided into three discreet sections and that each therefore describes not just the passage of time but a development in the speaker's understanding of her own feelings.

Most candidates immediately noted the personification of the house which 'pines when you leave' and is echoed in the second section ('Our house hides its face in hands of silence'). Some struggled with the meaning of 'pines' and wanted to link it to other representations of trees; more relevant responses linked it to

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the ‘bird who grieves’ and realised that both are metaphorical representations of the mother’s emotions. Those who were able to identify her feelings of loss as a form of grief were much better able to appreciate the way the poem ends. Good answers explored ideas of migration as well as growing up, or the implications of a bird which has fledged, and needs to fly the nest in order to test the strength of its own wings and find freedom and self-reliance.

Many candidates noticed the effects of enjambment and caesura; fewer looked at the shape of the stanzas and the effect of medial breaks. Those that did realised that the rhythm of the poem marks the passing of time and includes pauses for thought – both for us and the mother – in an empty house which is no longer so busy with family life. Candidates wrote especially well about the ‘vacant room’, most appreciating the analogy to a painting: it is a ‘still-life’ because the scene is no longer dynamic, and it is as if time has stood still. Some enjoyed the reference to how the picture is ‘framed’, while others commented on the significance of an ‘unclosed door’, as teenagers usually close their doors, but the mother wants to keep a connection with her child open, even though she has gone. Most saw the significance of the ‘open book on the floor’: the mother has not wanted to move or change anything, the book might be a symbol of communication or the girl’s educational aspirations, and it is now only ‘read by sunlight’ and presumably fading. Some contrasted the ‘sunlight’ outside with the ‘darkness’ of the wardrobe in which the ‘forget-me-not’ dress is hung. For some candidates this reflected the joy of the child contrasted with the mother’s grief, or the sunlight of her future contrasted with the darkness of memory. One candidate commented on ‘the sun being omnipresent … easing [the mother’s] solitude’ and referred to ‘the radiating warmth in the room, perhaps replacing the one emitted by the daughter, helping the mother’. Another candidate wrote that ‘the daughter was the sunlight, the warmth of the poet’s life’ and argued that it could not compete, despite its strength. Several thought the ‘flower-dress’ emblematic of childhood innocence and found it interesting that the girl had left it behind while the mother wanted to preserve it. Many picked up on the subliminal message of the flower motif, and some linked to imagery of the natural world later in the poem. Several commented on the slow movement of this stanza, linking it to the mother’s struggle to make sense of her feelings, the irony of the flower’s name and the poet’s use of the present tense to explore the mother’s grief in more detail. Some appreciated how parents continue to do their children’s laundry even after they have left home!

Alert candidates realised that the bullet points were intended to help candidates with the three different sections of the poem, and that the second section was therefore about her daughter returning again for the seasonal vacation and then leaving again. Stronger responses noted the seasonal changes, such as the horse-chestnuts, Christmas, ice and snowdrops. The best linked these seasonal changes to the progression of the mother’s feelings, which become darker and more heavily grief-stricken, so that the daughter’s return simply provides a temporary ‘singing’ counterpoint to growing heartache. Candidates who noticed the slowing rhythms brought about by caesural pauses, short lines and short, even single-word phrases and sentences, realised that the house was not just so silent that the mother can hear the dropping conkers, but she is struggling to articulate her feelings ‘in hands of silence’. Some noticed that when the daughter returned, ‘the house’ became ‘our home’ again, but that the exuberance is brief and succeeded by the imagery of a frozen winter. Good responses understood how the speaker marks the passage of time, which seems natural, but struggles to define her role now she is no longer ‘mothering’: she calls the feeling ‘this other thing’, which lies heavily upon her every day.

Candidates struggled more with the final section, both with its imagery and with its deeper implications. Those who were able to hear the way it echoes ‘Now I know’ in the last line of the previous section, were able to see that it is an attempt to define that new knowledge. The best saw that it is not just full of images of abandonment and loneliness, or of the passage of time (‘dusk’, ‘the evening star’) but also intimations of mortality (‘bells like a spelling’, ‘and then what next...’). Many were able to see the dark magic of the images invoked in this stanza while struggling to pinpoint the mother’s feelings. Some felt she had accepted the change, while others, perhaps more accurately, felt this section showed deepening despair. Most noticed that the poem does not end conclusively, but with an elusive ellipsis. Some noticed how the ‘shy sorrow’ is personified as something that lacks clear name or identity. Some contrasted the ‘one chord’ on the piano with the daughter ‘singing’ on her return and found this further evidence that the house has become lifeless. The view from the mother’s window seems only to deepen her melancholy, and a number of candidates wanted to interpret these images: the magpie sits alongside other bird images – it might be an image of freedom, or it might be more sinister, as magpies are often birds of ill omen or repute; some thought the ‘marble girl’ a reminder of the daughter, frozen into immobility, while others thought it might represent the mother’s static feelings, and while some thought the church bells ‘like a spelling’ were a reminder of the daughter’s childhood, others thought it might be a tolling bell which sits alongside other dark images of the passing of time such as the duck falling and the evening star. The image of the evening star caused most problems as the simile ‘like a text’ was for most a reference to twenty-first century forms of communication. They wanted it to be a daily message from the daughter, rather than a more ominous message of mortality and the passing of time.

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Naturally, the difficulty of a poem like this is that candidates need to empathise with the feelings of the mother – with emotions that they have not experienced, yet – when they naturally connect much more with the feelings of the young person close in age to themselves and apparently welcoming new freedoms. However, the skill of the poet's craft, and the skills of candidates in interpreting it, were amply demonstrated by the level of critical and personal engagement which many strong candidates were able to show while reading this poem closely and reaching a deeper understanding of the emotions it expresses.

Question 2

The prose extract from *Waiting for Barbarians* by J. M. Coetzee, the South African Nobel Prize winner was a less popular choice and some of the candidates who chose it appeared to lack confidence in analysing the techniques of prose fiction. For stronger candidates, however, this passage proved both strongly descriptive and highly dramatic. Good responses were intrigued both by the leadership of the narrator, and the mysterious character of 'the girl', while focusing primarily on both the storm and its aftermath. The storm seems to be not only devastatingly destructive in potential, as it reaches the party of travellers but also ominous. The best responses considered the aftermath of the snowstorm which left the travellers 'numbed' and lethargic and in danger of being vulnerable to further developments.

All the candidates found the first bullet point an accessible guide to the earlier parts of the passage, observing that the 'gigantic black wave' is not only a sinister contrast to the snow-white desert scene but also personified as 'visibly devouring the earth in its approach'. Strong responses say that this turns the storm into some kind of monstrous and ravening beast, with a 'crest' and surrounded by 'murky clouds'. One mentioned how the black of the storm 'contrasted with the 'snowy plain' as the image of black over white makes it seem otherworldly and alien' and that 'originating from the clouds' it was 'beyond human understanding'. Candidates alert to the importance of syntax in narrative prose picked up the urgency of the narrator's comments – 'I have never seen anything so frightening' – and the men's actions which is communicated through short, abrupt sentences. Personification gives agency to the weather, as the snow 'begins to eddy and fly'.

Many commented on the mystery of the anonymous girl and how she sees the storm and responds differently from the men. Some noticed that the men seem very superstitious 'the snow was not a good sign after all', and that the girl's silence also seems ominous. Most noticed the repetition of 'great black', and some commented on the substitution of animal imagery with the notion of an animated wall, 'roaring' and moving 'with the speed of a galloping horse', with a life of its own which is hostile to human beings. Some deduced that it was not the first time that the men had suffered: 'the familiar howl is in our ears again', and good analytical responses noted the narrator's use of present tense, giving the scene immediacy, and the first person plural, suggesting his solidarity with his men.

Short sentences and exclamations bring out both the urgency of the situation and the commanding nature of the narrator, who takes charge of what seems a very organised approach to the danger. However, words such as 'scramble' and 'chaos' suggest that any control is only superficial: good responses pointed out the polysyndeton of 'whirling sand and snow and dust' to show the combined dangers of both snowstorm and sandstorm. The instinctive terror of the horses adds to the danger, while stronger candidates noticed the onomatopoeia of 'whirled', 'hits' and 'hurl' to conjure up the violent impact of the storm. Most noticed the 'scream' of the wind and how it reduces the narrator's shouts of command to 'a whisper', demonstrating who is now in charge. Candidates enjoyed unpacking the similes which compared the horse to a 'phantom', as if it were already lost for ever, or moving through the sandstorm as 'like crawling against running water'. The writer's listing of 'my eyes, my nose, my mouth' and the sinister sibilance of 'stopped with sand' or the internal rhyme of 'heave to breathe' were all examined by candidates as indications of how the narrator is now struggling to survive, let alone assert leadership in the face of the storm's power.

Some candidates noticed that the girl is affected in a quite different way, standing 'with her arms stretched like wings over the necks of two horses'. A few thought she was some kind of angelic presence, and many noticed her almost supernatural capacity to calm the horses, while one of two felt there was a more sinister aspect to her magic, even suggesting she was somehow in league with the storm. The contrasting reactions of the different travellers, 'the men' following the narrator's lead but 'the girl' establishing her own power, wrapped in mystery like the 'black scarf' which covers her face and eyes, interested candidates while remaining an unresolved question in this passage.

The last bullet point was the most difficult for candidates, as is often the case. Candidates would be well-advised to plan their answers carefully in order to pay sufficient attention to how passages (and poems) end. The final two paragraphs contrast, as one portrays the five hours of struggle against the storm and the other 'the unfamiliar quiet' which follows but is by no means restful. Good responses noticed that the storm

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appears to be bullying or punishing the men: they ‘huddle’ while it ‘lashes’ them. Further listing brings out the range of enemies they face: ‘snow, ice, rain, sand, girt’. The strongest answers showed awareness of the effects of five hours of exposure to this intensity of coldness. They observed that the men ‘ache with cold’ and are ‘caked with ice’, so that they have almost lost their humanity, which is emphasised by the need to ‘press together’ with their horses to share what little warmth remains. Some noted that the men have now been reduced to the condition of animals.

The final paragraph suggests that the relief is sudden – ‘as if a gate has been closed, somewhere’ – but might be another kind of trap. The quiet is not only ‘unfamiliar’ but painful as the travellers’ ‘ears ring’, their limbs are numb, and they struggle ‘to make the blood run in our veins’. Weaker responses could only engage with language points as they arose in the course of reading. Some did this so diligently and in such detail that they scored well in any case. One such saw the closing image of the stopped veins making the travellers vulnerable: ‘the idea that they needed to do something to return the blood to their veins suggests how life-sucking and draining the experience was’. The narrator urgently gives further orders. He recognises the dangers of exposure and lingering in their vulnerable position. The best responses saw this, and the reason why lethargy was dubbed ‘sinister’ and followed by an exclamation mark. It draws attention to the idea that the ‘nest’ the men are tempted to remain lying in will not be a place of safety.

The best responses to this passage brought out not only the plethora of descriptive techniques that bring the struggle between the travellers and the storm to life, but also that this dramatic passage suggests that other dangers may lurk for them. The strongest answers investigated the authoritative language of the narrator, and the ambiguous and mysterious nature of the girl.

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