LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 0475/11
Poetry and Prose

Key messages

In successful responses, candidates:

- sustain a focus on the question
- write personal responses that are informed by evidence from the text
- support their ideas with well-selected concise quotations
- analyse in detail ways in which writers achieve their effects.

In less successful responses, candidates:

- begin their answers with unnecessary background information or a list of devices the writer uses
- refer in general terms to 'themes' they have revised without addressing the key words of the question
- depend on narration, explanation and/or assertion rather than close analysis
- use long quotations without analysing the effects created by specific words, phrases and sounds
- log writing devices without exploring the effects created.

General comments

The strongest responses showed evidence of selecting relevant material for the question that had been set. As explained in previous reports, this is an essential requirement of the examination: questions are not prompts for candidates to unload all their knowledge about the poem or character or theme or setting mentioned in a question. In less successful responses, candidates simply re-told the story or explained the content of poems and prose texts with little regard for the question.

The most successful responses addressed the key words of the question in their opening paragraph, paying attention to the intensifiers (adjectives and adverbs such as 'striking' and 'vividly') in questions that help candidates to select relevant material to focus their answers. In less successful responses, there were many opening paragraphs that included one or more of the following features: biographical information; a list of general themes relating to the text; a random list of techniques the writer uses. There were also too many final paragraphs that simply repeated ideas made and, therefore, already credited earlier in the answer.

The most assured personal responses integrated brief quotations to support the points being made. In the strongest Poetry and extract-based Prose answers, candidates quoted directly from the text printed in the question paper. Success in Prose general essays, however, depended on candidates' recall of a wide range of direct quotations; those candidates without such recall have to depend on general assertions which cannot lead to high reward.

The most perceptive responses sustained critical analysis of ways in which writers achieve their effects in conveying their ideas. Less successful responses simply listed devices without close analysis of *precise* ways in which writers use them to create *specific* effects. The most assertive and least effective comments were found in Poetry answers on writers' use of enjambment, caesura and rhyme. Learners should be taught to distinguish between assertion and close analysis.

Some candidates applied the terms 'poem', 'play' and 'novel' to the wrong literary form which invariably led to a lack of appreciation of a writer's use of form. For these candidates, poetry essays became mere paraphrases of the poem attempting to pin down meanings (sometimes with limited evidence for their interpretations) rather than explore ways in which poets achieve their effects. Similarly, less successful prose essays focused on content and neglected to comment on ways in which fiction writers use, for example, description, dialogue and narrative viewpoint to convey their ideas.

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Most candidates wrote in legible handwriting though some did not. Teachers should remind candidates of the fundamental importance of communicating their ideas clearly to Examiners.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

More successful candidates responded thoughtfully and individually to Auden's choice of metaphors and provided an informed personal response to the progression of the speaker's grief. There was some particularly effective consideration of the poem's second half which unpicked the possible implications of the different moments and feelings of lines 10 – 11, and the speaker's desire for darkness and emptiness in the last stanza. Less successful responses talked in general terms about stages of grief, hyperbole, black and white as symbols of death, and the supposed musicality of the rhyme scheme. There was much paraphrase of the funeral arrangements. Detailed textual support was often lacking and literary terms were identified but without consideration of their purpose or effect.

Question 2

More perceptive responses were sensitive to the poem's emotional complexity, quasi-religious phrasing, and moral argument. They responded in detail to the poem's shifts in perspective from environmental to civilisational and unpacked the implications of the brief descriptions of the natural world and living creatures. Some were attentive to the changing structure and deceptive simplicity of the phrasing. They argued that the world's beauty was not just physical but also moral. Less successful answers struggled to get much out of the poem beyond its rhetorical questions and its constant refrain of 'Away, melancholy'. Some simply provided a reading based on the speaker's melancholy which did not explicitly address the question. Many candidates provided overlong quotations and asserted how they conveyed beauty in the world without specifying how the use of language achieved this.

Question 3

Stronger responses considered a range of advantages of the rich, from the invisibility of their sins to the luxuries of their lifestyle and commented on Peacock's satirical and scathing descriptions. One answer demonstrated a critical understanding of the visual imagery used throughout the poem and the advantages of being judged by a society predisposed to consider your wealth as a sign of moral value. There was some sensitive attention to poetic structure and effects. Conversely, many responses offered a narrative re-telling of the poem with unexplained textual references. Other answers in this category repeatedly asserted that the rich have 'advantages' over the poor, without specifying exactly what they are, or focused on the poem's presentation of contrast between rich and poor without responding directly to the question prompt.

Question 4

Successful answers sustained informed personal responses to how the plaits are memorable and how they represent justice/inequality/different groups of people in the poem. They provided a sensitive analysis of the plait symbolism and its application to the poem's sense of justice and social equality. They also responded to Smither's presentation of the natural imagery to symbolise difference and eventual unity. Answers which were not as successful demonstrated a basic personal response to Smither's feelings and tended to repeat points about justice. Many candidates could not engage with the ideas or imagery in the poem beyond the idea of the plaits being different.

Question 5

This prompt drew some perceptive responses, which showed engagement for the poem and question. The strongest answers were able to develop and sustain a personal response to the writer, the fox/forest in the poem and how ideas appear. They responded to elements such as Hughes' presentation of the arrival of inspiration through the (sensual) imagery of the wild animal, the tame indoors, the pathetic fallacy, the mysterious outdoor environment, and the weather. Some demonstrated an understanding of the form and stages of the poem, including the movement from the blank mind/forest, through creativity/approaching fox, to completed poem/stink of fox. There was a response to a shift in tone with the urgency of the 'now' towards the end of the poem. Less successful answers tended to describe the environment and the setting and did

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not appear to appreciate the extended metaphor throughout the poem. Often these answers lacked appropriate textual support.

Question 6

The stronger answers were able to focus on the memorable impressions of the speaker created by Hughes considering ideas such as envy, greed, cruelty and self-justification. They argued how the presentation of the 'Other' reveals the weakness of the speaker through the metaphors of rubbish, possession, divine justice and classical inevitability. Some explored the structure and form of the poem, including the shift in tone and its darker connotations at the end of the poem, seeing this as a process of entrapment. Less successful answers focused excessively on biographical information regarding the relationships between Hughes, Plath and Wevill.

Section B

Question 7

Successful answers were able to consider in detail the missionaries' increasing power and how it is exercised; these answers evaluated the significance of their attraction to disempowered people such as Nwoye and women. There was careful exploration of the different kinds of power they had (taking land, making buildings, singing loudly, changing local perceptions of what religion should be). There was a little analysis of language and narrative perspective, though this could have been developed. in greater detail. Less confident responses were vague about the implications of 'powerful' and missed the humour in the people's faith in the powers of the 'Evil Forest' and the attribution of power to the white man's 'glasses'. Some responses showed only a limited knowledge of the text as a whole.

Question 8

There were too few responses seen to make meaningful comment.

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

The more successful answers here produced sensitive readings informed by a knowledge of the wider text, responding to the resonance of the setting, the reminders of past unhappiness, and the contrast between the characters' earlier lives and their present encounter. They were able to respond to Pip's narrative perspective and his still-infatuated view of Estella shown by his close descriptions of her features and how she has changed. They also reflected thoughtfully on the ambiguous ending and the characters' different expectations. Less successful answers were often still able to comment on the wreck of Satis House, the use of pathetic fallacy, and the changes in Estella as revealed in the extract. They were, however, unclear about the context of the extract within the wider novel.

Question 12

There were too few responses seen to make meaningful comment.

Question 13

Knowledge and understanding of the whole novel proved invaluable in allowing candidates to show the poignancy of this extract and the part that it plays in the development of the plot as it marks a key turning point with a shift in power dynamics. There was some confident analysis of the description of Mrs Danvers' face, the confrontational dialogue, and the actions and gestures of both women, such as Mrs Danvers' opening and shutting hand and the narrator becoming so exasperated that she shakes her by the arm. Some answers picked up on the supposedly newly confident narrator's continuing use of 'Mrs de Winter' to refer to her predecessor. Weaker interpretations wrote about the 'dark shadows' under Mrs Danvers' eyes as an indicator of her evil nature rather than considering them as a sign of her despair. These less successful

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answers commented on the use of questions by both characters without considering how these conveyed the power struggle between them.

Question 14

There were too few responses seen to make meaningful comment.

Question 15

More successful answers addressed the question prompt 'build tension' by reference to the overall situation of night-time and children walking home, the increasing worry demonstrated through Jem's actions and dialogue, and the narrator's attempts to evaluate the situation as she slowly realises her brother's seriousness. Some considered the close relationship between Scout's rising panic as narrator and the tension this creates about what is going to happen, often informed by their knowledge of what does in fact happen and how it is signalled in the text. A few produced highly individual and sensitive responses which discussed, for example, the way everything that could go wrong did go wrong (Scout forgot her shoes, the light went off just as they realised, her costume was too noisy and bright) and one even noted that Scout was dressed as 'prey'. Less successful responses seemed unaware of the characters and events of the novel and picked out individual elements which seemed to indicate tension in themselves (such as the light going out, the thunderstorm and Halloween). Many answers were vague about the causes of the 'tension' and thought it sufficient to quote from the extract and assert that the given quotation proved that the 'tension was building'.

Question 16

The more successful answers here illustrated a perceptive understanding of the inherent racism and narrow-mindedness of the townsfolk of Maycomb, drawing on examples such as the Tom Robinson court case and the misunderstanding and gossip relating to Boo Radley. This was then contrasted with the compassion and kindness shown by Atticus, Miss Maudie and others. Weaker interpretations often provided a simple plot synopsis and listed basic character traits with very limited use of textual detail.

Question 17

Assured answers to this question showed an appreciation of Lindsay's use of irony, her contrast of tones and use of subtext. They responded to elements such as the buoyant upbeat tone of Dianne de Poitiers' wedding preoccupations, the insignificant and tedious manner of Mr Whitehead's conversation with Mrs Appleyard about gardening arrangements and flag-flying, with its cryptic passing reference to Sara, and Jasper Cosgrove's letter with its effusive civility towards Mrs Appleyard. They could see Mrs Appleyard's deceit and lack of acknowledgement to the corpse of Sara that lies buried in the college gardens, murdered by Mrs Appleyard herself, the woman charged with Sara's care. Less confident responses provided a simple narrative re-telling of the extract.

Question 18

There were too few responses seen to make meaningful comment.

Question 19

Perceptive responses showed a sophisticated grasp of literary skills in presenting the threat, danger and power of the Martians, with detailed textual support of the violence and destruction caused by the Heat Ray. These responses also understood the power of humans to resist and evade the assault by means of counterattack and the narrator's underwater survival skills. Less successful responses provided a simple descriptive approach to the question, paraphrasing the action, without explicitly addressing the task – with the assumption that a description of events was self-evidently proof of the 'power'.

Question 20

There were too few responses seen to make meaningful comment.

Question 21

The most engaged answers responded to the narrator's eyebrow-raising cynicism and contempt for her family and those around her, commenting on her disparaging descriptions of her parents' eating habits,

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Gwen's apparent degeneration into 'silliness' and 'giggles', and the physical pain it caused her ('My body ached') to hide her real feelings from her parents' friends. Few answers commented on the 'vividness' with which the narrator's feelings were revealed or on the use of first-person narrative voice. Less successful answers either relied on paraphrase and quotations which showed how the narrator is feeling, rather than how these feelings are revealed, or alternatively made assertions which were not borne out by any evidence in the extract (such as how good it was that the narrator was going to be able to leave home for better opportunities abroad, or alternatively how awful it was that she was going to leave all her friends behind). Most answers responded to the extract in isolation, without referring to relevant details elsewhere in the story such as the long paragraph just before this extract where the narrator explains exactly why she has no intention of marrying. Less successful responses shortened quotations by using ellipses, which often had the effect of omitting the very words that would support the points being made.

Question 22

The strongest answers provided a detailed examination of Atwood's accumulation of the woman's 'unusual' behaviour in amassing her food store and her clandestine activities such as hiding the gun, as well as her interpretation of 'signs' such as her husband's disappearance, the smoke, which amounted to a state of paranoia. Only the most successful responses showed understanding of Atwood's narrative perspective, which focuses almost exclusively on the woman's preoccupations, but reserves the writer's prerogative of critical detachment through her use of third person narration. A few argued that this helps to convey a degree of scepticism about the woman's sanity and her clarity of thought. Weaker responses either made unsubstantiated speculative claims about an approaching apocalypse or war or simply restated the key term in the question (it's a mystery) with little attempt to explore the mystery in the story or how Atwood reveals this.

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LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

Many candidates understood that this sonnet is a witty exercise, reversing the conventional view of the relative standing of flies and humans in the chain of being. The similarities between the two groups were clearly grasped – that both are destined for death, which can come unexpectedly. Contrasts, however, proved more difficult. Some candidates presented a rather black and white view, contrasting the innocent fly with corrupt humans, suggesting that all humans were incapable of leaving any meaningful legacy behind. There were some thoughtful explorations of language, including the use of metaphor in the book of life and the fly's gleaming wings. In weaker responses, candidates described or simply noted, without precise analysis of specific effects, aspects of the sonnet form and rhyme schemes

Question 2

The most successful responses were well-structured essays tracing the speaker's changing feelings throughout the poem. Some noted the tension between the third-person title (*The Man with Night Sweats*) and the first-person perspective of the poem, arguing that the body is portrayed as the speaker's guide and companion through life, allowing him to develop his individual and sexual identity. By the end of the poem this relationship has shifted, with the speaker 'hugging' his body as if trying to recreate the 'shield' that once defended him. Sensitive responses observed the contrast between the body's past and its current state, and the tone of regret and nostalgia which characterises the early stanzas. Some of the best answers addressed the simile of the 'avalanche' in detail, in its inexorable descent and gathering force.

Question 3

The plight of the man in the mountains was readily understood, and many candidates wrote convincingly about how Smith evokes pity through vivid imagery; some saw the implied presence of a possibly God-like figure, watching from afar. There were suggestions that perhaps the man's 'tail' represented an individual's past, and that the 'man' was trying to escape from past mistakes or an unfortunate situation. Some candidates appreciated the power of the use of direct address, involving the reader in the dilemma along with the poet and her concern for the 'delicate creature'. Others offered a more humorous interpretation of some details in the poem such as the comic image of the tail caught in the pass, the speaker's invitation to mockery ('Is he not an ass?') and, they argued, the almost flippant colloquialism of the final comment 'It is touch and go'. The strongest interpretations were supported by persuasive detail in the poem; the weakest offered paraphrases of the poem that lacked such support.

Question 4

Candidates who focused on 'the thoughts and feelings of the speaker' generally proved able to select relevant material for well-developed responses. Those who worked through the poem, drifting from the speaker's emotions to the behaviour of the official, made themselves a difficult task. More successful responses provided evidence of the speaker's anger, sense of belittlement and resignation; some argued that the use of 'It' in the line 'It contains a Z, and it just moved house') is evidence of the official's inhumanity. Some candidates noted that the poem moves between the speaker's own thoughts to their interpretation of the official's mind 'working', including the speaker's wild fantasies about what the officer suspects may have happened mid-air to change their appearance. Some candidates lost focus on the poem and commented on discrimination more generally, offering assertions rather than close analysis of the detail of the poem.

Question 5

Most candidates understood the contrast between the bored, indolent animals and the powerful and 'enraged' jaguar, with the most successful exploring the connotations of some of the poem's more thought-provoking imagery, for example, the boa-constrictor's 'fossil' and the 'nursery wall'. The strongest responses focused on the power of imagination and the restless spirit of the jaguar. Some of the best answers offered persuasive interpretations of the lines 'there's no cage to him/More than to the visionary his cell', arguing that

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the jaguar is depicted as a prophet, seeing beyond his immediate situation to another, more liberated world. One candidate suggested that the image of the world 'roll(ing)' under the jaguar's heel creates the impression of a colossus-like figure, rotating the globe and usurping the position of the sun through his power.

Question 6

The most successful responses selected words and images at key points in the poem showing different facets of the wind's power and explored the ways in which Hughes achieves his effects in detail. These responses noted the way Hughes uses dynamic verbs ('crashing', 'stampeding') to suggest that, as if awakened by the storm, the landscape itself has come to life. Some candidates wrote sensitively about the idea that inanimate objects become real: the house with its moving 'roots'; and the window 'trembling to come in', like a pleading traveller or stranger. Many responses observed the shift both in time, from night to morning, and in perspective, from the wider landscape to the people within the house. Only a few of the better responses explored images such as 'flexing like the lens of a mad eye'; one candidate suggested it conveyed the idea of being watched by an unpredictable, menacing being waiting to pounce.

Section B

Question 7

Successful responses grouped difficulties into types (such as weather, physical, mental) and traced a development from one type to the next throughout the extract. These answers made insightful links between the extract and the wider novel, commenting on the context; they had a clear understanding of the way the events in the extract served to develop Okonkwo's characterisation, most notably, his obsession with success. Most were able to offer at least some comment on language such as the similes 'like a funeral' and 'burned like hot coals'. Less successful responses simply re-told the extract as a narrative, with some making only glancing references to difficulties faced by Okonkwo without analysis of how Achebe conveys them and without addressing the key word 'vividly'.

Question 8

Successful responses showed a clear understanding of the complex portrayal of friendship rather than simply repeating the basic idea that they are friends who show loyalty to each other. These stronger responses offered precise detail of key events: the wedding of Obierika's daughter, Okonkwo's exile, destruction of the compound, Okonkwo's death. Many candidates commented on their different character traits, observing that opposites can attract. It was generally felt that Okonkwo benefits greatly from the support and advice from his calm and wise friend. Less successful responses lacked detailed textual reference to support their general ideas. There was some misunderstanding, for example, describing Obierika as advising Okonkwo against the killing of Ikemefuna before it takes place when his views are made clear later in the novel.

Question 9

Stronger responses considered Raka's motivations for her desire to climb to the top of the hill and linked this to her upbringing. They commented on her determination, independence, need for solitude and ease with all things in nature; they also explored her unsettling fascination with fire. There was much detailed consideration of Desai's use of language (e.g. 'as if shot out by a gun', 'ravaged, destroyed and barren places', 'sickly-sweet smells of illness'). Less successful responses lacked exploration of the writer's effects, offering only simple explanations of surface meanings or re-telling the 'story' of the extract. These answers ignored the key words 'In what ways does Desai vividly convey…'

Question 10

There were too few responses to make meaningful comment.

Question 11

The most successful answers were able to contextualise the extract's position within the wider text and explored convincingly the dialogue between Pip and Estella from their prior knowledge of their complex long-term relationship. There was convincing analysis of ways in which Dickens makes this such a disturbing moment by focusing on characterisation and the use of dialogue and setting. Most candidates were able to make some comment on the 'witch-like' description of Miss Havisham. Only the stronger responses analysed

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the implications of the more troubling descriptions of her in, for example, ‘something positively dreadful in the energy of her looks and embraces’ and ‘devouring the beautiful creature she had reared’. Weaker responses adopted a narrative approach, were unclear about the context of the extract within the wider novel and were confused about which characters are speaking in the dialogue.

Question 12

There were too few responses to make meaningful comment.

Question 13

There were too few responses to make meaningful comment.

Question 14

There were too few responses to make meaningful comment.

Question 15

Most candidates understood the immediate context that Dill is so unhappy at home that he has run away; they observed Jem’s growing maturity and Scout’s perspective that he had broken ‘the remaining code of our childhood’. Many responses noted the contrast between Dill’s words (‘I’m not scared.’) and the description of his fear which ‘went white’. More successful responses were able to explore the humour as well as the seriousness of the situation, commenting on Atticus’s ‘pleasant dryness’, for example in his joke about soil erosion. Some candidates commented not only on the alliteration and rule of three in his words ‘From rape to riot to runaways’ but also the contrast between the seriousness of these issues and the fact he is ‘chuckling’ as he says these words. Weaker responses retold the content of the extract without achieving focus on the question’s key words.

Question 16

Responses tended to be narrative-driven, with insecure understanding of who the relevant characters are. The lack of specific textual detail led to overly assertive answers. Those candidates who were able to provide detail, including direct quotations, produced more convincing and informed personal responses to the question. They understood how Scout’s enthusiasm for starting school is quickly extinguished by Miss Caroline’s stolid ‘new way of teaching’ and her perverse intention to ‘try to undo the damage’ done by Scout’s ability to read already. The strongest responses analysed Lee’s depiction of Miss Caroline’s hapless attempts at teaching as viewed from Scout’s perspective.

Question 17

Successful responses engaged with the key word ‘dramatic’ and focused on Mrs Appleyard’s extreme anxiety as she awaits the girls’ return, her extreme relief at the sound of the wheels of the drag and her horror at the news of the missing girls and teacher. The strongest answers explored the dialogue between Mrs Appleyard and Mademoiselle with its many unanswered questions, with a few candidates commenting on the effects of the ellipses in Mademoiselle’s speech and the dramatic impact of Mrs Appleyard’s short sentences. Weaker responses needed more probing analysis of the ways in which Lindsay makes this such a dramatic moment, with greater use of the material in the extract.

Question 18

There were too few responses to make meaningful comment.

Question 19

Stronger responses focused on the way Wells depicts the artilleryman, a professional soldier, as a broken figure, referring to descriptions such as ‘blackened and haggard’ and ‘brokenly’ to develop a sense of how traumatised the character is. There was some sensitive analysis of the artilleryman’s graphic account of lying under ‘a heap of charred dead bodies’. One candidate suggested the disjointed nature of the character’s speech conveys a sense of post traumatic shock. The character was often viewed as a foil to the more measured narrator. There were some answers that offered direct reference only to the opening section of the extract which made it difficult to produce detailed and developed responses to a range of suitable textual details selected from across the whole extract.

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Question 20

In the few responses seen, there was an understanding that the Martians are destroyed not by humans but by bacteria and that the Martians are not invincible after all. The strongest responses explored the ways in which Hills achieves his effects, commenting for example on the language used to describe the 'putrefactive' bacteria ('these germs of disease'), on the descriptions of the sounds made by the dying Martians (such as 'desolating cry', 'dismal howling', 'yelping') and on the suddenness of the howling stopping ('The silence came like a thunderclap'). Without the ability to use relevant direct references to the text, some candidates were unable to analyse closely and instead offered unsupported assertion and narrative approaches.

Question 21

Most candidates understood that Scranton, who purports to be an astronaut, had in fact never been to the moon. The more successful responses explored the ways in which Ballard memorably portrays this fraudster scamming enough cash to fund his drinking. Some analysed the stereotype of the American couple, noting disapprovingly their rather brusque and dismissive rudeness to the narrator. There was also an appreciation in the strongest responses of the waiter's ironic 'Who else but the man in the moon?' Examiners reported that there were many responses that lacked a secure understanding of events and characters in the story. Some thought that the narrator and Scranton are the same person or that the narrator is a retired astronaut who had walked on the moon.

Question 22

There were too few responses to make meaningful comment.

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- use long quotations without analysing the effects created by specific words, phrases and sounds
- log writing devices without exploring the effects created.
- use ellipses in quotations which omit those key words that would support their ideas
- make general personal responses about ideas not actually in the text, including references to their own lives.

General comments

The strongest responses showed evidence of selecting relevant material for the question that had been set. As explained in previous reports, this is an essential requirement of the examination: questions are not prompts for candidates to unload all their knowledge about the poem or character or theme or setting mentioned in a question. In less successful responses, candidates simply re-told the story or explained the content of poems and prose texts with little regard for the question.

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Most candidates wrote in legible handwriting though some did not. Teachers should remind candidates of the fundamental importance of communicating their ideas clearly to Examiners.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

Most candidates recognised the emotional impact of the call on the speaker, including the range of feelings such as disbelief and excitement. They noticed the imagery of the flying saucer and the physical sensations affecting the speaker. The most successful answers showed detailed appreciation of writing effects such as the use of hyperbole, for example, the exaggerated feelings of the speaker, the shifts in tone and the ironic twist revealed by the absence of a cheque in the line, 'we do not deal in money.' Stronger answers also commented on the theatrical nature of the phone call and the conversational style of dialogue. Some less successful candidates were distracted by the idea of fraudulent callers and scammers, whilst others were sidetracked by the idea of prank calls from people they know.

Question 2

The most successful answers focused on the key word 'disturbing' and selected points from the poem to discuss this. They commented on aspects such as the sinister, controlling nature of the planners, the unnatural descriptions of the streets and houses – the quietness, the allusion to sickness, the snake-like plastic hose and particularly the personification of the houses' 'frightening stare.' Strong answers appreciated Atwood's satirical voice and the structural build-up from surface order to threatened collapse, and recognition of social critique. Less successful answers generally understood the poem but did not focus directly on what was disturbing. A few candidates wrote extensively about global warming, often including personal opinions and assertions that were not supported by the poem.

Question 3

The few candidates who answered this question showed overall understanding of the poem – that children from wealthy families grow up in comfort but are unprepared for the harsh realities of life or the consequences of over protection. Stronger answers explored the unsettling tone, the image of the 'citadel' and the warning voice. They appreciated language features such as the imagery of the 'warm nursery', the windows as a barrier or the symbolism of snow and winter. Less successful answers paraphrased the poem and did not respond to the key word, 'unsettling'.

Question 4

Stronger answers showed understanding that the journey is both a physical and symbolic representation of the changes affecting Zimbabwe, 'from bush to concrete', after the arrival of the British. They recognised both positive and negative changes of the transformation and commented on the use of the extended metaphor, along with the contrasting imagery of suffering -the 'sjambok and jail', 'dry from human blood' and life in the city with its 'tower lights', and 'new-found luxury'. These responses noted the poem's emotional range—from weariness to hope, dreams, and nostalgia—and its contrast between past and present. Some candidates did not fully understand the poem and treated it as an actual journey.

Question 5

Most candidates showed understanding of this poem and responded with enthusiasm and engagement. They noted how the sea is depicted as a vast, powerful and merciless force of nature in which nothing can survive. Most understood the harsh reality of nature and the cycle of death and life. The strongest answers effectively analysed a range of the many images such as the coldness of the 'deeps', the intense fight for life of sea creatures and their brutal destruction or the image of bleached jawbone. Some less successful

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answers considered the poem to be primarily about the effects of pollution and did not engage deeply enough with the text of the poem. A few candidates lost sight of the question focus and wrote in general about the poem.

Question 6

The strongest answers selected relevant points from the poem which considered the question. Admirable qualities they noted included the man's physical strength and skill in working with the sheep, his resilience and endurance in harsh conditions, and his concern for the sheep – 'suddenly savage, suddenly gentle'. Stronger candidates provided effective analysis of the rich imagery, for example the contrast between the physical heat in his body and the freezing cold, the significance of the cigarette, or the comparison of the man to the horse. Less successful answers did not respond to the question or paraphrased the poem. A few candidates wrote in too much detail about biographical details.

Section B

Question 7

Candidates who performed well paid close attention to narrative details in the passage and effectively linked these to the social upheaval and confusion present in Umuofia. They identified the contrasting perspectives of Mr Brown and Reverend Smith, with particular emphasis on Smith's rigidity, noting how his inflexible approach contributed to conflict and unrest in the community. Stronger candidates addressed the division and antagonism toward those adopting the new faith, using the example of Enoch. These responses thoughtfully examined literary features such as the use of biblical language and the description of Enoch. Less successful responses struggled to clearly identify the factors illustrating confusion within the passage and tended to offer only a basic summary.

Question 8

Most candidates responded to this question with confidence, providing relevant examples of how Okonkwo is memorably portrayed in the novel. They selected points such as how he was admired by the clan for his strength and success or how he ruled his family with a heavy hand and was feared for his temper. Many candidates also commented on his relationships with his father, his son, Nwoye, and his favourite daughter Ezinma. They often referred to the killing of Ikemefuna. The strongest answers analysed his complex character, considering his contradictions of strength and vulnerability, the motives for his actions and the effect of these on others. They supported points with detailed examples of specific incidents from the novel as well as memorised quotations. Less successful answers provided general character descriptions without textual evidence. The response overall to writing effects, even in stronger answers, could have been more detailed. Some candidates explored the tragic hero theme but could have commented on features such as the use of proverbs and Igbo culture, the animal imagery describing Okonkwo, for example, 'He was as slippery as a fish in water,' or examples of foreshadowing of events in the novel.

Question 9

The few candidates who chose to answer this question showed some understanding of how this moment is sad. They recognised the attempts of Ila Das to be positive, and commented on her poverty, 'her odd jerky figure' and the incident of almost being pushed into the ditch. Stronger answers noted her changing perspective from being 'buoyed up by Nanda Kaul's friendliness,' in the beginning of the passage to her 'trembling chin' in the last sentence. These responses appreciated the sad tone and the detailed descriptions of her actions and thoughts. Weaker responses adopted a narrative approach, and some were unclear about the context of the extract within the wider novel.

Question 10

There were too few responses to make meaningful comment.

Question 11

Many candidates viewed this extract as a key turning point in the novel where Pip must face the reality that his love for Estella will never be reciprocated. The strongest answers analysed the motives and actions of Pip and Estella. For example, some candidates noted that Estella's coldness toward Pip was both a catalyst for his personal growth and a sign of her toxic upbringing by Miss Havisham. Successful answers explored a range of writing effects such as the pleading tone of Pip's comments, the significance of the body language,

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or the intensity of Pip's dialogue. A few answers included comments about Miss Havisham. Weaker essays did not respond to language or became a moral commentary rather than technical analysis.

Question 12

There were too few responses to make meaningful comment.

Question 13

Most candidates were aware of the context of this scene and showed understanding of the sinister character of Mrs Danvers and the insecurity of the narrator. Candidates commented on the gothic elements of the house -its isolated position, the black clothes worn by Mrs Danvers and the parts of the house that were almost forbidden. The power imbalance was discussed noting that whilst the narrator should have been in charge and leading the discussion, she is instead intimidated and belittled by an employee. Successful answers analysed the passage in detail and appreciated deeper implications such as the significance of body language, for example Mrs Danvers, folded hands or her unsmiling face and the nervous actions of the narrator. Weaker responses missed some of the undercurrents in Mrs Danvers' words – 'she spoke in a peculiar way, as though something lay behind her words.'

Question 14

There were too few responses to make meaningful comment.

Question 15

Most candidates showed some understanding of what is revealed in the passage – Alexandria's prejudice; the integrity, high morals and parenting style of Atticus; Scout's defiance and insecurity, and the love and respect of the family, apart from Aunt Alexandra for Calpurnia. Nearly all candidates explored the racist attitude of Aunt Alexandra and the Maycomb community, comparing this to unbiased view of Atticus. The most insightful responses engaged deeply with the text, commenting on Atticus's firm interactions with Scout and Alexandra. They provided effective analysis of various writing features, including the onomatopoeia in 'punk punk, punk,' to highlight Aunt Alexandra's irritation, and the use of the adverb 'deadly' in Atticus's reply. Some less successful responses lost track of who was speaking and confused the characters at times.

Question 16

There were too few responses to make meaningful comment.

Question 17

The most successful answers insightfully analysed Mike and Irma's relationship in this passage. They recognised the relaxed contentment on the surface but that they behaved more like childhood friends than lovers. They noted the hints in the passage that the relationship may not mature – 'in the late afternoon the little lake grew cold', the double meaning in Irma's comment, 'Oh Mike!. Then it *is* over,' and the symbolism of the 'rotting floorboards.' Stronger responses also explored the setting and weather, and the significance of the swan, linking this to Mike's feelings for Miranda and the wider novel. Less successful answers did not explore deeper implications in the passage, and a few did not know what to say about the relationship beyond that they liked each other.

Question 18

There were too few responses to make meaningful comment.

Question 19

The few who answered this question showed some overall understanding of the passage and context, noting the population's lack of response to the invasion and the fate of those approaching the Martians. Most recognised the humans' ignorance and how Wells portrayed unreported danger, but some struggled to stay focused on the extract or provide specific analysis. Very few candidates responded to language such as the conversational tone of the narrator, the list of daily activities or the descriptions of the burning houses.

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Question 20

There were too few responses to make meaningful comment.

Question 21

Stronger candidates fully understood the narrator's misinterpretation of his mother's actions and linked selected points to the question – a powerful ending to the story. These answers explored the narrator's range of feelings – anger, resentment and hurt and commented on his childish language and cynical remarks. They responded to the last lines, the symbolism of the flag and the mother's message. Some candidates referred to the father and Miss Pym although did not always link their points to the question. Less successful answers tended to be narrative, and some were confused about the characters and mistook Miss Pym for the mother.

Question 22

There were too few responses to make meaningful comment.

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LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 0475/21
Drama

Key messages

- Teachers should refer to the 0475 syllabus during the planning stages of the course for set text requirements to avoid candidates creating a rubric infringement on Paper 2 Drama.
- Opening paragraphs should be brief, address the key terms of the question and avoid plot summaries, or listing themes or techniques to be addressed in the essay. Effective introductions concisely outline the points to be covered in the following response, demonstrating question focus and planning.
- Textual reference and quotations should support ideas, be relevant, brief, and analysed fully. Commenting on quotations or punctuation chosen at random, without exploring the context and linking it to the question, is unlikely to be rewarded.
- Candidates should base their writing on the printed text studied and not on film versions of the texts which may veer from the original.
- An awareness of the text as drama and a personal engagement with the impact of the play onstage are essential qualities of successful responses.

General comments

Many candidates had a sound grasp of the plots of their chosen texts, showing familiarity with key moments, and engaging with the characters and their relationships. This enabled them to select relevant material and provide precise substantiation. There were responses seen to all texts with *A Street Car Named Desire* and *A Taste of Honey* the most popular. Centres are reminded that *Death and the King's Horseman* will be replaced on the set syllabus texts in 2026, by Pearl Cleage's *Blues for an Alabama Sky.*

In this series, fewer introductory paragraphs featured lengthy context or background material. However, many introductions did list literary features or themes to be discussed, often ones not particularly relevant to the question, and which then sometimes did not appear in the essay, wasting valuable time.

The most successful responses were clearly structured, with focused introductions, logically developed paragraphs, and relevant conclusions. This clarity of organisation helped sustain convincing arguments. Successful responses maintained focus on the precise terms of the question throughout, selecting the most relevant material to answer the question. The choice of the appropriate 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. With the extract questions, which were the most commonly answered across the paper, the weaker answers tended to include prepared material on key themes or characters without either explaining their significance for the question set or identifying where they actually appeared in the given extract. The more successful responses engaged thoughtfully with the emotional experiences of characters, helping them to shape personal and evaluative responses to the drama, expressing how moments were moving, humorous or revealing for them as an audience. When supported with textual detail, this personal engagement strengthened the overall quality of the response.

In this series there was some evidence of candidates having little knowledge or understanding of the studied text, reflected in the confusion between characters' names, inaccuracies in plot details and even confusion over a character's gender. Many responses were extremely brief with a very narrow range of reference and therefore little to credit. There was also an increase in blank responses where candidates had not attempted the question at all, as well as several rubric infringements on Paper 2 where candidates answered two passage-based or two discursive questions. In this case, both essays were marked but only the higher mark awarded. Centres are reminded to refer to the syllabus requirements at the start of the course and for teachers to familiarise themselves with the precise examination requirements of the syllabus, to avoid candidates incurring rubric penalties. A significant number of candidates treated **Question 3(b)** as a combination of the essay prompt and the extract, writing about Blanche's breakdown with reference to the

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extract only (for which it provided very little evidence). These were marked instead as **Question 3(a)** if this gave an opportunity for higher reward.

A significant number of responses relied heavily on retelling events, showing knowledge but lacking analysis of how the playwright shaped meaning and impact. There was an increase in answers without any supporting evidence, just assertions. Candidates should remember that narrative and assertion is unlikely to receive high reward. In many cases references to the text were either too general or there was no exploration of the reference which weakened the persuasiveness of the argument. There were missed opportunities to analyse imagery, symbolism, tone, and distinctive speech patterns, or to explore how dialogue and stage directions shape meaning and audience response. Many could have been improved by a less narrow range of reference and further analysis of the textual details which would show understanding of the playwright's craft.

An awareness that these texts are written to be performed onstage informed the most successful answers. They referred to the 'audience' rather than 'reader' and the 'play' rather than 'book'. They were able to explore stagecraft and the authors' methods to convey the main concerns of their chosen texts and to outline their own, or propose other audience members', responses. Candidates frequently overlooked how character relationships are revealed through staging, movement, use of props, sound or silence, which limited the dramatic depth of their analysis. The best responses 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, is unproductive. Any comment on the use of exclamation marks or punctuation has to be analysed in context otherwise the comment is meaningless. Candidates are reminded not to refer to line numbers instead of quoting from the text as this limits opportunities for analysis of the ways writers achieve effects.

Weaker responses offered straightforward moral judgements about characters (for example, labelling them as wholly good or bad) without acknowledging complexity, contradiction, or development within the play. Others had an insecure grasp of context, judging events through a purely moral lens rather than considering the contextual framework. Stronger answers were able to use context productively and demonstrate their understanding of the wider play and its concerns, but without losing focus on the extract or question. It was, however, still rare to find answers which were informed by a knowledge of what happened immediately before or after the given extract, for example Theseus' predictably positive response to the mechanicals' play in the extract given his determination, shortly beforehand, to choose it for the wedding entertainment.

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 and in the argument being presented.

Comments on specific questions

SHELAGH DELANEY: *A Taste of Honey*

Question 1

(a) Generally, candidates had a good understanding of the dysfunctional relationship between Jo and Helen and with some awareness of the context of the passage. Many responses addressed the changing relationship, Helen's attempts to prove Jo needs her and Jo's determination to prove her independence and reject offers of help. Most were alert to Jo's sarcasm and the tell-tale sign that she called her Helen instead of Mother.

The stronger responses explored the irony of Helen's critical comments on Jo's plans for motherhood, her attempts to change the subject from her own failed relationship and the drama of their dialogue. These responses questioned the reasons for Helen's return as being more self-seeking than truly caring, and some addressed her frank admission to her flaws, forgetting her daughter when snatching moments of happiness, or tastes of honey, 'while (they) lasted'. There were some thoughtful comments on the metaphor of the title and Helen's unconvincing protests that she was not hurt by Peter's desertion.

Many candidates recognised Jo's scepticism, her exaggeratedly assured stance ('we're wonderful!'), articulating her experience of neglect and emotional insecurity and growing self-awareness and resilience ('I could take care of you'). The strongest made careful reference to the text, the significance of Geof providing the cot, Jo's curt 'we like it' and assertive claim to her own

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flat, but perhaps the weak foundation to her claims of self-sufficiency. They developed this with reference to patterns of behaviour being repeated, cemented by Jo's comment of being 'back to where we started'. More developed answers recognised how accusatory questions, sharp retorts and insults ('that throwback') create tension and expose unresolved resentment between mother and daughter.

Weaker responses summarised the exchange or referred to Helen's neglect as a whole, with less close focus on the text and there were some misunderstandings. A number of candidates offered blunt judgements about either character without sufficient reference to the text, labelling Helen as loving with no ulterior motives, and Jo as a rude and insensitive daughter. Precise textual support was often lacking.

(b) Most candidates argued that Boy was a likeable character. There was an understanding of him treating Jo well, his consideration when she is ill, and wanting to marry her, his caring gestures such as offering her a toy car and his 'soul' and the romance of his giving her a ring. A few had access to such details of the text and his professions of love but most responses remained at a basic, generalised level.

The few stronger responses addressed Boy's impact on Jo, in contrast to Helen and Peter, keeping her spirits up through his friendly and cheerful personality and in turn lifting the mood of the play, making him likeable to the audience. They picked up the banter and playful dialogue. Some stronger responses explored Boy's ethnicity and how this is treated in the play, discussing the candid way in which he describes the prejudice he has experienced and his surprised admiration of Jo's equanimity. Some usefully tied in social context, the stigma and social judgements that underpin interracial relationships, his concerns that Helen might not accept him, seeing him only as a 'coloured boy', borne out by her later comments. Some discussed how his positive qualities, in the face of the evident racism he has encountered, make him sympathetic and likeable.

Few candidates discussed Boy's less likeable characteristics, his casual attitude to Jo and her feeling that he would inevitably disappear. Some drew on the reputation of sailors with girls in every port, and his taking advantage of a vulnerable schoolgirl. The few stronger responses considered Jo's own thoughts showing how her judgement of Boy becomes more qualified, as revealed in her later comment to Geof, doubting whether the relationship revealed 'much about love' and the wry 'he came in with Christmas and out with the new year', contributing significantly to the theme of abandonment.

There were a significant number of misreadings, candidates referring to Jo in the passage as 'Boy', reading the question as *how are male characters presented*, without reference to Boy himself, or writing about Geof instead. Other basic responses gave a generalised account of his loving treatment of Jo but without close reference and without considering the implications of his absence from the later play and the effect this has on Jo's plight.

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

Question 2

(a) Most candidates understood Pilkings' mistrust of Elesin, Elesin's bitterness in return and Iyaloja's contempt for Elesin. This was not, however, supported by much relevant textual detail. Nearly all candidates referenced Pilkings' superior and dismissive attitude towards Yoruba culture though very few discussed the ways in which his actions could be driven by his moral beliefs. Often candidates saw Pilkings as very much to blame for what had happened to Elesin and the discussion was skewed towards the effects of colonial rule without a clear focus on the task or this particular extract.

The best answers discussed how Soyinka used vivid language and imagery throughout the extract to convey characters' thoughts and feelings. They commented on the power imbalance created by Pilkings' control and his threatening promise to keep Elesin under scrutiny, after failing to impose his notion of 'honour'. Stronger responses explored the emotional violence of Iyaloja's language, the repeated rhetorical question 'who are you?' and direct speech 'no, you said' to powerfully drive home Elesin's betrayal. The extended use of natural imagery (the plantain stem, seed) was explored as well as the accusation that Elesin's 'self-vaunted' bravery was 'hollow' and nothing but 'words', conveying moral judgement. They showed understanding of Yoruban values and how these shape the emotional intensity of the scene, Iyaloja speaking on behalf of the community who

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had had such faith in Elesin. One high achieving response understood how Soyinka powerfully conveys feelings of betrayal in the reference to the sweetmeats and privileges bestowed on Elesin only to be met by his failure to act as the 'hunter who brought the quarry down'. The strongest recognised the complexity of Elesin's thoughts and feelings: his blame of Pilkings and the 'masters in this land' and helplessness ('I could do nothing'), alongside self-awareness and shame ('I more than deserve your scorn').' The complex and conflicting notions of honour, trust and betrayal were noted, along with the implications of this moment for all parties.

Weaker responses attempted to rephrase the dialogue or tended to concentrate mainly, or exclusively, on the feelings of Elesin and Pilings and said little, if anything, about Iyaloja and the response of the Yoruba community to Elesin's failure. Whilst figures of speech and metaphor were sometimes identified, for example 'the eagle he promised he would confront', they were often not fully understood.

(b) All candidates who answered this question were able to make some relevant comments on the character of Olunde. Most explored the fact that Olunde is the only Yoruban character in the play who has experience and understanding of both Western and Yoruba culture, acting as a bridge between the two and how this makes him, to some extent, a sympathetic character since he allows the audience to 'see both sides'.

Some of the stronger responses referred to Olunde's calm and reasoned discussion with Jane Pilkings in which he declares his gratitude for what he learned in England but emphasises the importance of honour and duty in the Yoruban tradition. His comments on sacrifice and Jane's hypocrisy also enable the audience to see this tradition more objectively. A few cited the reasoned but ominous dialogue between Jane and Olunde in Scene 4 on suicide and the sacrifice of one to benefit the many, anticipating his final actions. They explored his decision to choose honourable sacrifice for the good of his people and discussed how this made him a sympathetic character, especially since he made clear that he sought sympathy from nobody. Some sympathised that his promising life is cut short, he had to take on this role long before he should have, before he could fulfil the aims of his medical vocation. The most successful responses anchored comments to details and dramatic effects, for example the tangible shame he feels when discovering his father's failure, conveyed in his stillness on stage and his curt rejection of Elesin ('I have no father, eater of left-overs'). One observed that, through Iyaloja, Soyinka suggests Olunde is honourable to sacrifice his life, as preordained, for the good of his people, but to Pilkings, Olunde's suicide is incomprehensible, meaning that audience sympathy may be conflicted, depending on our response to these characters. Interestingly, the shocking revelation of Olunde's corpse and the effect this has on the characters on stage, particularly Elesin, and the audience, did not feature in responses.

Weaker responses were narrative in approach with very little textual support or comment on language and effects. Some featured assertions that Olunde failed to find acceptance in Britain or his homeland and prejudice from his own people.

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: *A Streetcar Named Desire*

Question 3

(a) This was the most popular question with much rich material to explore. Most responses identified some key revelations in the scene, demonstrating an understanding of Stanley's rude assertion of authority and the signs of attraction between Blanche and Mitch. Stronger responses were able to consider wider textual issues such as Blanche's genteel expectations of courtesy met with Stanley's deliberate display of coarseness and casual violence, exposing his ownership of Stella. Some related this usefully to historical context, the Old South values coming into conflict with New America. Others insightfully discussed Stanley's power over all present, not simply the 'women', speaking on behalf of the men ('no one's going to get up') and establishing the poker game as strictly male-only territory and himself as the alpha. Many identified the laughter as revealing camaraderie and that such behaviour is normalised. Many considered the motif of Blanche's desire to cleanse herself ('again'), the stronger ones seeing this in context of Stanley's ill-mannered treatment and her 'nerves' exposed by this hostile environment.

There was some insightful discussion of Stella's unease and verbal protest, recognising her willingness to retreat rather than further challenge Stanley, revealing her emotional dependence and complicity. Her blindness to his flaws, and clear admiration ('look at him') was contrasted with Blanche's sarcastic tone in the 'stamp of genius' comment. Several responses usefully linked such

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revelations to later conflicts and developments, particularly Stanley's escalating aggression, Stella's loyalty to Stanley and Blanche's vulnerability and attempt to challenge her sister. Most considered Blanche's response to Mitch, with more developed responses exploring Blanche's immediate interest as a sign of her desire for protection and stability, evidenced by her concern for his prospects ('is that something much'). The strongest saw significance in this meeting being staged separate from the hostile masculine pack, his 'awkward courtesy', polite address 'Miss Dubois' and his maternal care justifying Blanche's appraisal of him as 'sensitive' and 'different'. One interpreted the hesitation in Blanche's description of Mitch as '– superior' as revealing the desperate and fragile nature of her hopes of a match. Other varied responses saw revealing characterisation in Stanley's initial controlling inquiry ('where you been?'), Blanche's lack of interest in Mitch's sick mother and her disregard of Stella's discomfort, prioritising her own.

Weaker responses tended to offer a narrative response, paraphrasing the passage or repeating prepared material relating to Stanley as primal, and overlooking the more subtle details of the interactions between the characters. There was misunderstanding of Blanche's question about Mitch as a 'wolf'; many were led into zoological speculations about his ability to hunt in packs or mate for life. There was little focus on language beyond the stage direction of the dramatic slap and the 'certain interest' shown by Mitch and Blanche, seen by many to reveal 'love at first sight'.

(b) There were some excellent responses with a sound and sensitive understanding of the factors that influenced Blanche's mental state throughout the play, culminating in the final scenes. There was a good response to stagecraft here, including recurring symbols of lighting, music and bathing. Most candidates explored how Blanche's ongoing clashes with Stanley affected her relationship with both Stella and Mitch, and the horror of the ending of the play. The stronger responses moved beyond a recount of events and were able to track key stages in Blanche's deterioration over the course of the play, judiciously incorporating key references to dramatic effects. They demonstrated understanding of Blanche's collapse as a slow psychological unravelling shaped by repeated trauma and loss. Some better responses noted the significance of the title and Blanche's destination being dramatically foreshadowed. There was also understanding of early indications in Blanche's instability and hidden drinking and the use of contrasting costume to indicate her delusions of grandeur and later disintegration. The strongest analysed the final scenes, the drama of her response to Mitch's rejection, alongside Stanley's brutal verbal and physical assault and her final poignant exit from the stage. The most successful answers balanced sympathy with critical insight, showing clear understanding of her flaws and self-deception, acknowledging that Blanche's illusions function as a coping mechanism, helping her endure emotional pain rather than simply a way of deceiving others.

Some of the weaker responses struggled with the word 'dramatically' and lapsed into narrative, recalling Blanche's life-story from the death of her husband to being taken to the asylum but without differentiating between what is experienced on stage and what is reported by Blanche or Stanley. Others focused solely on the end of the play without reference to signs of her emotional fragility or labelled Blanche as 'mad' without examining how Williams dramatises her decline. Some made dismissive judgements, reducing Blanche's suffering to personal weakness only.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE*: A Midsummer's Night Dream*

Question 4

(a) Candidates engaged well with both the question and this moment in the play. They recognised the mechanicals' lack of dramatic experience and most grasped the context of a play performed for the wedding of the courtiers and their commentary on it. Most candidates discussed the decision to have an actor portray Wall, his over-explanatory lines, his actions and interaction with the 'lovers', as a source of much physical and verbal humour. Many responses discussed the mechanicals' failure to understand the protocols of a dramatic performance, for example breaking the fourth wall. Stronger answers were able to pinpoint different humorous elements: mispronounced words, the running joke of Ninus being reduced to 'Ninny', Bottom's anxiety to prove the performers' skill to the Duke, the repeated and over-exaggerated exclamations, the misused classical references and heavy-handed rhyming in the script. Some were able to relate these to deeper implications and ideas in the play, such as metatheatre, the differing classes and educational abilities of those classes, and the ironic echoes of the main play's plot and characters, as well as the gloriously inappropriateness of the play as a wedding entertainment.

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A few considered the context of the scene and the audience's expectations given the rehearsals and the nature of Bottom's over-confident character or recognising that it came as a relief after all the conflict in the forest. Others insightfully and precisely noted the parallels between the problems and silly behaviour of Pyramus and Thisbe and the lovers in the forest, separated by a father, and therefore the irony of the latters' criticism. However, very few could make sense of Theseus and the courtiers' comments, apart from Hippolyta's line about the silliness of it and this was only used to acknowledge it was a silly play.

There were issues over misreading of 'eyen' as a mistake by Bottom rather than the archaic plural term for eyes or the use of a young man to play a female role considered hilarious but not recognised as a convention of the time. Weaker answers made general assertions about the ineptitude of the mechanicals and the annoyance of their audience, without closely illustrating the former or distinguishing between the responses of the courtiers. Many relied heavily on the comic potential of the Wall, restricting the scope of their response, or struggled to develop points, particularly when discussing language. Very often candidates found it difficult to go beyond asserting that the scene was funny.

(b) Although there was some understanding of the character, the responses tended to be quite narrative, showing knowledge of some events but with very little comment on language and the drama of Oberon's control.

Most answers were able to identify Oberon as the king of the fairies (a few confused him with Theseus) and referred to how his desire for control led him to badgering Titania to give him her 'changeling boy'. Stronger responses used multiple moments beyond this encounter, considering his orders to Puck, his pleasure in 'torment(ing)' Titania and attempt to control Demetrius' feelings for Helena. Many successfully made reference to gender politics and his problematic desire for mastery as Titania's 'lord', relating this to other examples of patriarchal control in the wider play, but retaining the main focus on the question of Oberon. A few engaged with the ill effects of Oberon's actions on the weather and natural world and the jealousy demonstrated in his comments about her relationship with Theseus and 'the hateful fool' Bottom. The most successful employed details such as his provocative and manipulative tone ('Give me that boy and I will go with thee), his manner of ordering and blaming Puck ('fetch me' 'this is thy negligence'), his boastful knowledge of the flower ('I saw, but thou couldst not'). Most ignored his sympathy for Helena and, interestingly, none considered Oberon's role in bringing about the resolution and harmony at the end of the play, the happier outcomes of his magical interference in mortal affairs.

Weaker responses had narrow range or focused solely on his interaction with Titania, offering very limited textual support and neglecting Oberon's role in the wider play. The interference in the love lives of Demetrius and Lysander was seen just as interference and given as an example that Oberon wanted to 'control' everything. There was little sense of either the humiliating or comical outcomes of his magical interference and very little comment on language.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE*: Antony and Cleopatra*

Question 5

(a) Successful responses considered the 'intrigue', in particular that created by Cleopatra's response to Thyreus. Thyreus's desire to speak in private with Cleopatra ('hear it apart') was used to evidence mystery and create a sense of secrecy but there was often limited comment on language. Stronger responses established the context to the moment and Caesar's attempts to manipulate Cleopatra and the uncertainty created by her apparent submission and calculated ambiguity. Stronger responses discussed the language Cleopatra uses about Caesar and the significance of her offering Thyreus her hand, exploring whether her behaviour represents an earnest or strategic betrayal of Antony. Discussion of Thyreus' language was also a discriminator of better answers. Some stronger answers discussed the uncertainty of Enobarbus losing faith with Antony and the significance of his asides, giving an intriguing glimpse of his inner turmoil and suggesting future developments. One used Enobarbus's judgement of 'thy dearest quit thee' as an indicator that both he and Cleopatra will desert, feeding into the theme of shifting loyalty. The drama of Antony's entrance and response to Cleopatra's seeming betrayal was discussed by some and others commented on the intensity of Antony's fury but without reference to 'intrigue'. Only a few engaged with his realisation 'authority melts from me', his attempt to re-assert his power and how this may cause the audience to wonder if this is beyond him.

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Weaker responses focused on plot with simple paraphrase of the passage and with limited response to language or effects and with misunderstanding. Some weaker responses included lengthy contextual information regarding the current status of the relationships of Caesar, Antony and Cleopatra, but with scant focus on the extract itself and there was often limited grasp of the word 'Intriguing'. Alternatively, the context of the moment was missing and Antony was seen as purely jealous.

(b) The most popular moments chosen were: the wounding of Antony, his death, Cleopatra's suicide and Enobarbus's remorse. Many candidates seemed rather unsure how to approach the question and wrote about how they personally felt about particular characters but did not always explore the significance of the chosen moment in the wider play or moved beyond moments to large sections of the play. Stronger responses were able to go beyond a personal response or basic points regarding death being 'moving' to demonstrate how emotional impact is created through language and staging. The best answers discussed the language of the moments they chose and explored in detail what it revealed about the characters and why its dramatic impact made it moving in the context of the wider play, relating to the themes such as political loss, love, honour and loyalty.

Weaker responses tended to write narratively with an element of personal response but without analysis. Many lacked any textual detail or quotation and were repetitive. Many strayed well beyond 'moments' to cover large sections of the play which conveyed how characters were portrayed.

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LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 0475/22
Drama

Key messages

- Teachers should refer to the 0475/0992/2010 syllabus during the planning stages of the course for set text requirements to avoid candidates creating a rubric infringement on Paper 2 Drama.
- Opening paragraphs should be brief, address the key terms of the question and avoid plot summaries, or listing the writer's techniques to be addressed in the essay.
- Textual reference and quotations should support ideas, be relevant, brief, and should be analysed fully demonstrating how the reference supports the point. Commenting on quotations chosen at random or punctuation, without exploring the context and linking it to the question, is unlikely to be rewarded.
- Candidates should base their writing on the printed text studied and not on film or stage versions of the texts.
- 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

The majority of candidates had a sound grasp of the plots of their chosen texts and engaged with the characters and their relationships. There were responses seen to all texts with *A Street Car Named Desire,* A Midsummer Night's Dream and *Death and the King's Horseman* equally popular across components. Whilst there were more responses seen to Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* and Shelagh Delaney's, *A Taste of Honey* than in the summer series, there were still relatively fewer responses to these texts. Centres are reminded that *Death and the King's Horseman* will be replaced on the set syllabus texts in 2026, by Pearl Cleage's *Blues for an Alabama Sky.*

There were fewer answers giving lengthy context or background material in the introductory paragraph. However, many introductions did give a list of literary features or themes they were going to discuss – often ones which were not particularly relevant to the question- and then did not mention or explore them at all in the answer. This wastes valuable time in an examination of 45 minutes per question. There is still the desire to spot a theme at the end of every paragraph and this is a major distraction in less successful answers as candidates tend to lose focus on the actual terms of the question. Stronger candidates write with an integrated thematic awareness.

There was some evidence of a few candidates having little knowledge or understanding of the printed text with frequent references made to films and stage productions, not always faithful to the texts. The lack of knowledge of texts was also reflected in the confusion between characters' names, inaccuracies in plot details and even confusion over whether the character was male or female. Amongst these was confusion over Delaney's character, Jo, seen by some characters to be male, perhaps evidence that the passage was attempted as an unseen text, rather than the text having been studied in depth.

The most successful responses focused on the precise terms of the question and maintained that focus throughout, selecting the most appropriate, relevant material to answer the question. A few candidates did not read **Question 1(b)** carefully, ignoring the rider which clearly stated: 'Do **not** use the passage in **Question 1(a)** in answering this question.' Answers which ignored this and based their answers wholly or partly on the passage were self-penalising as material taken from the passage could not be rewarded.

There was an increase in answers without any supporting evidence, just assertions. Candidates should remember that narrative and assertion is unlikely to receive high reward. Ideas should be supported by close reference to the text or the use of brief quotation which should be analysed and linked to the point being made, or to the question. In some cases even when answers referred to the text, there was no effort to

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explore the reference and sometimes, direct quotation was not even acknowledged by the use of quotations marks.

There was an increase in brief responses particularly where there was evidence that candidates did not know the texts well. There was also a considerable number of rubric infringements on Paper 2 on both 0475/22 and 2010/22 where candidates answered two passage-based questions, two discursive or two answers on the same text. In this case, both essays were marked but only the higher mark awarded. Centres are reminded to refer to the Syllabus requirements at the start of the course and for teachers to familiarise themselves with the precise examination requirements of the syllabus, to avoid candidates incurring rubric penalties. Candidates should remember to label their answers clearly, with the question number at the top of the response, and be made aware that mislabelled questions will be amended by the Examiner and, where appropriate, the rubric penalty applied.

Listing literary features as a way in which a passage was, for example, 'dramatic' or 'revealing', is 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. Candidates are reminded not to refer to line numbers instead of quoting from the text as this limits opportunities for analysis of the ways writers achieve effects.

An awareness that these texts are written to be performed onstage informed the most successful answers. They referred to the 'audience' rather than 'reader' and the 'play' rather than 'novel', 'text' or 'book'. They were able to explore stagecraft and the authors' methods to convey the main concerns of their chosen texts and to outline their own, or propose other audience members', responses. The best responses 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, is unproductive. Punctuation is relevant in so far as it organises speech but is only relevant if context and content and effect are included. Exclamation marks cannot be seen by an audience and not all exclamation marks mean that the character shouts that line. Any comment on the use of exclamation marks or punctuation has to be analysed in context otherwise the comment is meaningless.

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 and in the argument being presented.

Comments on specific questions

SHELAGH DELANEY: *A Taste of Honey*

Question 1

(a) The passage vividly presents the characters, Helen and Jo, and successful answers engaged enthusiastically with the dialogue to explore elements of both characters. There was understanding of what an audience would find striking in the unconventional nature of the mother/daughter relationship. Helen was often better understood with her selfishness and irresponsibility. Reactions to Jo varied with some more sympathetic and others unimpressed by her disaffected and negative attitude. Better responses explored how Jo's attempts to come across as independently minded might in fact be a kind of defence mechanism. Many candidates, given certain anglicisms and colloquialism, were less successful at grasping the banter and the humour, taking some of the characters' lines at face value. Some thought Helen saying, *'I can not bear to be parted from you'* was a sign of actual love for Jo, while others said it was sarcastic and even irritating that she was so unconcerned about anything Jo wanted or wished for. The most successful answers saw the symbolism in the setting as representing Helen's neglect and their dysfunctional relationship. Most candidates responded to the parent/child relationship identifying poverty as an important aspect of their life.

Weaker responses struggled to understand the language and sarcasm of the dialogue, commenting on their close relationship reflected in them '*sharing a bed again*'. The passage was retold or paraphrased with little understanding of the relationship. They tended to over-state two things: that Helen is an alcoholic and a prostitute. Delaney describes Helen as a 'semi-whore', but some answers said Jo's morals were corrupted by Helen's clients, queueing up. Again, Helen may feel that she 'needs' a drink, but she is not an alcoholic who has to drink a bottle of whisky for breakfast in order to function as some candidates commented.

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(b) Candidates found many reasons to sympathise with the difficulties of Jo's existence, and the problem for those with a sound knowledge of the text, lay not in finding material, but in selecting and organising it. Some of the most successful answers structured their response by showing how Jo is treated, chronologically, by the other characters in the play. She is abused emotionally by Helen and verbally by Peter; Boy and Geof treat her better, but she is abandoned left alone and pregnant by the former, and the latter is chased away by Helen when Jo needed him the most. Candidates who could comment on each of these relationships with close textual support and with careful links to the task, were well rewarded. As often happens with questions where relevant material is spread through most of the text, some candidates lapse into narrative, recounting the events of the play for each character, so that focus on the task was not always sustained. The best answers engaged with the dramatic impact of events in Jo's life with many candidates able to empathise with Jo. There was a clear understanding of the deeper implications of the text with Jo trapped in a cycle of life not dissimilar to her mother.

A few responses were not altogether sympathetic towards Jo because she is not always pleasant. For example, to her mother, perhaps justifiably so, and to Geof with less good reason. Though the weight of evidence led most candidates to feel sorry for Jo, balanced views were acceptable as long as they were supported by reference to the text.

Less successful answers could not refer sufficiently closely to episodes in the text and this resulted in a generalised sense of Jo being neglected, isolated and lonely but without any evidence. Several candidates resorted to using the passage in **Question 1a**, which was self-penalising.

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

Question 2

(a) Whilst there were some good responses showing understanding of the satire and the deeper implications of the Resident's behaviour and language, many candidates struggled to understand the nuances of his character, or the critique of colonialism that he represents. All candidates were aware of the high status of the Resident; some felt the Resident was a very competent and admirable man while others found him uninformed, arrogant and racist.

The most successful responses recognised that Soyinka presents the Resident as an authoritative, insensitive, and culturally arrogant colonial figure and demonstrated a secure understanding of the tensions between British administrators and indigenous Yoruba characters, using this to support their interpretation. The best responses engaged closely with Soyinka's language, dialogue, and stage directions to explore how the Resident becomes a memorable presence at this moment in the drama. There were a range of ideas about the Resident's language. For example, in response to the line*, 'I think they used to have some rather colourful sashes'*, more successful responses were able to explore why this suggestion could be patronising and emblematic of the troubling attitude of the colonisers. Candidates who paid attention to the tone of his replies, his dismissiveness, and the cold formality of his language were able to comment insightfully on how Soyinka makes him both memorable and objectionable. The best answers explored the humour in Pilkings' sotto voce responses and the irony in his suggestion that the Prince be informed of the true nature of the 'riot'.

Less successful answers showed limited understanding of this encounter: calling the Prince the King, and not understanding the Resident mistaking his own men for the rioters or why their uniforms had bits missing and ignoring Pilkings' lack of respect for his superior or just narrating the conversation. Some misread his portrayal by taking him at face value, mistakenly viewing him as keen to learn about native customs. Several answers treated the text as prose, rather than drama, missing the tension on stage and interaction between characters. Some weak responses confused this text with *Things Fall Apart.*

(b) This was a more popular question and Iyaloja's role was well understood. Most recognised Iyaloja as a powerful, morally authoritative figure whose presence carries cultural and spiritual significance. The most successful responses explored Soyinka's use of language, stagecraft, and characterisation to show Iyaloja as a memorable, morally compelling figure. These candidates were generally able to cite examples of her status, her commitment to the traditions of her people, her relationship with Elesin and her importance in the ceremony. Better responses pointed out she was respected not only by the women, but also Elesin and Pilkings. Iyaloja's love of her culture, her

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understanding of Elesin's weaknesses and her leadership qualities were all cited as part of her fascination. Her intelligence in foreseeing trouble with Elesin's love of earthly pleasures being too much to die willingly, and her authority in warning him against this, were features of stronger response. These candidates could give specific textual support. Few candidates, however, could refer closely to the power of her language, except when chastising Elesin at the end of the play. Similarly, many referred to her use of proverbs but could not provide examples. Most answers quoted that she was '*the mother of the market-place'* but not all showed response to language by analysing that being a mother meant she cared for the women and looked after their interests, standing up for their interests against colonialists and police.

Less successful responses wrote about her in very generalised terms with little textual detail to support comments. They tended to describe the character superficially describing her as 'powerful' or 'wise' or summarised the plot, rather than analysing Soyinka's methods in portraying her. Weaker answered ignored 'fascinating' completely and wrote a few comments about her role but with many misreadings of the text. Some commented that she offered her daughter to marry Elesin and that later she tells Olunde to kill himself. As with **Question 2a**, some weak responses confused this text with *Things Fall Apart.*

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: *A Streetcar Named Desire*

Question 3

(a) This was a very popular text and question. There were some sensitive answers to the developing relationship between Mitch and Blanche. Most candidates recognised that the scene is pivotal for the evolving dynamic between Mitch and Blanche, showing increasing intimacy and emotional connection. Stronger answers explored Williams' use of dialogue, stage directions, and dramatic tension to show the growing bond, while weaker responses tended to summarise the action or describe character traits without detailed reference to *how* Williams conveys the relationship. The most successful responses examined the fragility of their connection and how it is based on Mitch and Blanche's shared grief and fear of loneliness rather than attraction and compatibility. There was general agreement about Mitch's regard for Blanche and his hope that the relationship would progress; candidates cited his nervousness and his hope to reassure his mother, as evidence. There was some insight into how Blanche tries to recruit Mitch into her battle with Stanley, then how she encourages intimacy with Mitch through her sympathy and soft words. High-achieving responses also noted how she lies about her situation and avoids Mitch's question about her age, recognising the bittersweet nature of these tender moments of genuine connection, being built on a foundation of deceit. Some discussed how Blanche's flirtatious yet nervous speech conveys both desire and insecurity, and how Mitch's tentative questions and careful responses show empathy and caution.

Less successful responses relied on narrative, retelling the passage or over-emphasised the context by giving Blanche's back story at some length, losing focus on the passage. Some weaker answers were often less aware of Blanche's intentions here, sometimes asserting that she is not as keen as Mitch for this liaison to develop. Others found it difficult to see Mitch's hints at getting closer to Blanche. These answers tended not to use the passage effectively, making assertions, but not supporting them by close reference to the text. Some answers went well beyond the extract, explaining for example, how Stanley ruins their relationship later in the play, and missed opportunities provided by the extract.

(b) This was not as well answered as **Question 3a** and seemed quite challenging for some candidates who wrote generally about Stanley and Stella's relationship, rather than his '*feelings for Stella'*. The most successful answers wrote a balanced argument, exploring the moments of passion and tenderness between Stanley and Stella and also exposing the often manipulative and abusive qualities, and the role that sex and desire play in their relationship. Candidates who could explore the contradictions and ambiguities in his feelings and the relationship, supported by apt reference and quotation, were well-rewarded. Better responses recognised the toxicity of this dynamic and questioned the abusive nature of Stanley's need to dominate but there were many who concluded that Stanley's love for Stella was heartfelt and sincere. Other candidates justified Stanley's behaviour in terms of Stella's acquiescence. They argued that Stella was generally happy, even 'thrilled' by his antics and that the relationship was fundamentally a happy and successful one. This interpretation is supported by some evidence, though candidates had to be careful not to focus too much on Stella, as the question asks specifically about Stanley.

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Weaker responses drifted towards discussing Stanley, without linking this back to the question concerning his feelings for Stella. Some seemed to misunderstand Stanley as being a totally caring man who loved Stella, without seeing the underlying abusive relationship below it. Whilst some were able to identify Stanley's jealousy of Blanche and his fears of losing Stella to her, answers tended to be overly sympathetic, taking the view that, because Stanley was sorry for it, his use of violence towards Stella was excused by his subsequent distress. Disturbingly, a number of candidates also justified Stanley's rape of Blanche as he was a 'macho man', missing Stella, or that the sexual attraction between him and Blanche enabled them to arrive at this point whilst Stella was conveniently at the hospital.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE*: A Midsummer's Night Dream*

Question 4

(a) This was a very popular text and question with many perceptive and insightful responses to this '*powerfully dramatic moment*'. There was much to explore here and many candidates demonstrated critical understanding of the passage and wider context within the play as the pivotal scene behind Lysander and Hermia's decision to flee Athens, thereby setting in motion the rest of the play.

The most successful answers were characterised by a sense of audience and engagement with the shock factor of the potential consequences of Hermia's 'choices' and the unfair dominance of males. There was close exploration of the passage and the portrayal of Lysander and Demetrius to enhance the unfairness; the intensity of Theseus's description of the life of a nun and Hermia's spirited and unconventional resistance. The best responses analysed the language of ownership, Egeus's rigidity as compared with Theseus's more measured and slightly less callous approach and also contrasted Demetrius's arrogance with Lysander's passionate and ironic contributions. There were some perceptive comments on Theseus giving Hermia 'time to pause' and an alternative to death. However, surprisingly few candidates understood '*the fruitless moon'* meaning that nuns do not bear children. Hermia is the key character here and the best answers focused on her boldness and determination, explaining why what she says requires courage as well as conviction. Many candidates wrote about Hermia's plight with evident empathy. More successful responses were aware of how Shakespeare constructed her character to evoke these feelings in the audience.

Some less successful responses lapsed into narrative, gave literal translations of the passage or avoided much discussion of the passage, instead choosing to give a narrative overview of the play as a whole. Some wrote too much about the Patriarchy, at the expense of looking at the passage and ignored the question and the power of the language altogether. They also seemed to miss the death penalty issue. Many commented on the harsh punishment for disobeying your father in Elizabethan times, missing the Ancient Greek setting.

(b) There were some successful responses that recognised the use of situational and dramatic irony and the extent to which the audience is in on the joke being played on both characters. The most successful responses examined the cruelty of this joke on Titania whilst noting that Bottom's punishment for his unwarranted hubris is humorously just. They commented on the incongruity of a fairy queen loving a weaver who has an ass's head. These responses explored Bottom's inflated self-importance, the absurdity of the transformation, and Titania's enchanted adoration. The contrast between mortal foolishness and magical enchantment was also a feature of successful answers.

In weaker responses, candidates could not go beyond just asserting it was funny, narrating what leads up to the encounter – why Oberon uses the love-potion and why Puck give Bottom an ass's head, but without focus on the actual encounter. Weaker responses also gave narrative overviews of the whole text with limited comment on Bottom and Titania, or discussed their interaction in a generalised way, failing to note even the most obvious ways Shakespeare creates comedy. A few responses were very confused over the encounter and whether Bottom has a donkey or ass's head; some stated it was funny due to their confusion over the word 'ass' with a more colloquial synonym of his name, Bottom.

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WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE*: Antony and Cleopatra*

Question 5

(a) This question was the most popular on this text. Successful responses explored the characters' contrasting behaviour, tone and dialogue and commented effectively on Cleopatra's manipulation of Antony, and the way she dominates this passage and their relationship in general. There was understanding of the context, that Antony has been ignoring summons from Rome to return; that he now has to go to deal with the threat from Pompey, but that Cleopatra does not want him to go and tries to get him to stay.

There was critical understanding of their interactions and the mutual attraction, dependence, and tension revealed. Candidates commented on the way Cleopatra ignores Charmian's advice and is determined to approach Antony with fiery control. There was understanding of the way Cleopatra continually interrupts and dominates the exchanges with some candidates noting her use of hyperbole and superlatives in her emphatic and dramatic attack on Antony's character. Antony's contribution is straightforward: he is rational, affectionate and mostly patient, though with a hint of exasperation towards the end. Most candidates commented on some or all these aspects of his manner, many observing how difficult he finds it to say anything at all. Cleopatra is very different, and candidates who were able to work through her changing feelings with insight into the dramatic strategies she uses to manipulate Antony's responses, were able to meet the criteria for the higher levels. Some of the best answers recognised, and supported, a degree of uncertainty and insecurity in her, masked by her aggression and explored the theatricality in Cleopatra's 'performance'.

Weaker responses were hampered by misunderstanding of the context of the passage, thinking Antony was about to marry Fulvia or Octavia, not understanding that Antony knows Fulvia is dead but Cleopatra does not. At this point in the play, Cleopatra does not have that justification for her behaviour. Others were explanatory and narrative in approach with little textual reference or understanding of their relationship. Whilst some weaker responses made judgements about how this toxic, manipulative behaviour meant Cleopatra did not love Antony, there were some candidates who commented on the power of this love but this tended to be general with little focus on the passage. There were a number of misreadings including candidates mistaking Charmian for a random 'Chairman' referring to her as 'The Chairman' throughout the response.

(b) Whilst there were some successful responses which explored Enobarbus' role as advisor, confidant, loyal soldier and friend, there were many ineffective and largely narrative responses to this question. More successful responses understood that Enobarbus's feelings shift from admiration and loyalty to disillusionment and disappointment as Antony's behaviour changes. They effectively explored moments across the play which charted Enobarbus' wavering faith, eventual defection and subsequent death. Most knew the reasons for Enobarbus deserting Antony, his regret at deserting, and how his regard for Antony was restored. They considered Antony's honour in returning Enobarbus's treasures after he had deserted and the effect this selfless act had on Enobarbus, revealing his final shame and remorse. A few of the strongest responses considered Enobarbus's description of Cleopatra as a way of mitigating Antony's love for her, and the way he ignores his duty for her. The best responses analysed Shakespeare's use of language, imagery and dramatic structure, exploring Enobarbus's changing feelings and perspective, revealed through soliloquy-like reflections or asides, giving insight into his internal conflict. However, there was very little specific textual reference or quotations to support many responses.

Weaker responses focused on summarising Antony's actions, the plot or described their relationship without focusing on Enobarbus's feelings or how Shakespeare conveys them. Some did not know the text in enough detail to select relevant parts to consider and erroneously thought that he killed himself.

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LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 0475/23
Drama

Key messages

- The most successful responses avoided introductions which consisted of plot summaries, lengthy discussions of historical context or of the writer's life. Effective conclusions were more than a reiteration of points.
- Maintaining focus on the key terms of the question is essential in successful responses.
- Textual references and brief, precise quotations which were selected from throughout the text and analysed fully were the best method of supporting points. Line numbers in the place of quotations should not be used.
- If literary terms are identified, their intended effect on the audience should also be considered if the response is to progress.
- Brief contextualisation of the passage is important in passage-based responses, and detailed focus on textual references from throughout the passage and close exploration of the language was a feature of successful passage-based responses.
- In successful discursive responses the question remained in focus and precise textual references were selected from throughout the text.
- The most successful responses engaged with the text as drama and with the impact of the play on stage.

General comments

Many candidates demonstrated personal engagement with and enjoyment of the set texts and an awareness of the texts as drama was often evident. This meant that candidates were able to discuss the dramatic impact of the characterisation, stagecraft and language, resulting in a sensitive and perceptive approach.

There were two new texts this year*, A Taste of Honey* and *Antony and Cleopatra.* Centres are reminded that *Death and the King's Horseman* will be replaced as a set text in 2026, by Pearl Cleage's *Blues for an Alabama Sky.*

Candidates are allocated 45 minutes per essay and to produce a successful response. They should therefore immediately establish focus on the key terms of the question such as 'vividly', 'powerfully', 'striking' or 'memorable', ensuring that this focus is maintained throughout the essay. Making a brief plan before starting to write helps candidates to select relevant material from the text and encourages them to keep the question in mind. Annotation of the passage is also advisable as part of planning. Inclusion of lengthy introductory comments about the historical context of the play, a detailed plot summary or a list of themes to be covered are not productive within the limited exam time. Similarly, listing literary features as a way in which a passage was, for example, 'powerful' or 'memorable', is not a productive way to begin a response.

Successful responses understood that the texts are meant to be performed onstage and they engaged with the visual and aural impact of the play upon the audience, demonstrating this by referring to the 'audience', rather than 'reader', and to the 'play', rather than 'book'. Despite this, outlining recent stage productions of the play in detail or considering how an actor should deliver their lines is not a valuable use of exam time, and comments should be firmly rooted in the text. Strong responses showed an awareness that characters were constructs, created by the writer, and not real people and were able to outline their own, or propose other audience members' responses. The strongest responses 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, is unproductive. Less successful responses gravitated towards punctuation rather than the central ideas or accompanying language. Whilst relevant to the organisation of dialogue, punctuation must be considered in context, and the effect explored, otherwise the comment is meaningless.

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A successful passage-based response will often begin by briefly contextualising the passage within the wider play and by briefly referencing the question. The response should consider the key words in the question, the events of the passage and an exploration of the writer's methods in conveying his or her intentions to the audience. Brief well-selected references which are well focused, support a point and are preferably embedded in the writing, should be analysed fully but candidates should avoid over-analysis, as this often results in a response which is narrow in range and has limited coverage of the passage. Candidates are often able to correctly identify literary techniques such as simile, dramatic irony and foreshadowing, but the intended effect of these techniques should be analysed rather than simply asserting that they are present in the text.

In effective discursive responses, a sentence or two, referencing the key terms of the question, and giving a brief overview, is a helpful introduction, before going on to develop the points in the main body of the essay. Often, introductions featured valid ideas which were then not covered later. In successful responses a range of material was selected from the text as a whole and brief, well-selected references were used to support ideas, which is a key discriminator as indicated in the Level Descriptors. It is advisable for candidates to memorise brief quotations to be better prepared to analyse the writer's effects, and responses which lack analysis of these effects will not progress. Line numbers should not be used in the place of direct quotation from the passage as this limits opportunities for analysis of the ways in which writers achieve effects. As in passage-based responses, a detailed exploration of how the writer achieves his or her effects is an essential part of a well-developed discursive response.

Although handwriting is not assessed in this paper, it was observed that overall, the standard had deteriorated and at times obscured meaning. Candidates should attempt to write legibly and to avoid numerous crossings out to make sure that the response is as clear as possible.

Most candidates were clear about the exam requirement and answered one passage-based question and one discursive question. However, there were a number of rubric infringements where two passage-based questions or two discursive questions had been answered. A small number of candidates only answered one question or answered two questions on the same text. In these cases, both responses are marked but only the higher mark awarded. Centres are reminded to refer to the syllabus requirements at the start of the course. Candidates should be reminded to label their answers clearly with the correct question number at the top of the response.

Comments on specific questions

SHELAGH DELANEY: *A Taste of Honey*

Question 1

(a) Successful responses to this question often identified the happy and relaxed mood created by the stage directions of the fairground and balloons and commented on the use of light and darkness in the passage to illustrate Jo's wish to hide the reality of the dismal flat from her friend, preferring the '*romantic half-light*'.

The contrast of the relaxed and fun nature of Jo's relationship with Geof and her contentedness here, with her strained and unpleasant relationship with Helen was often identified, with comments on how Jo '*loved*' the fair, a positive word which is not normally associated with her. The naturalistic language used between the friends such as '*Do not be daft*' was also commented on. This level of response identified how Geof cares for Jo in a practical way during her pregnancy by making food and drink for her, and also how he makes her feel liked and safe. They understood that Geof is a part of Jo's joy and that these positive feelings are all in opposition to how Helen usually makes Jo feel.

Coverage of the passage was often thin in less successful responses which did not contextualise the passage with the understanding that Jo is now pregnant or the understanding that she is working hard to keep the flat. Candidates often found it difficult to identify the friendly relationship Jo enjoys with Geof, mistaking the banter between the two as Jo being aggressive and unsympathetic towards Geof. Some responses saw the opportunity to address the negative attitude towards homosexuality in the past, thus losing focus on the question.

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(b) Very few responses were seen. A few points were identified about Peter's dislike of Jo and his womanising, but there was little in depth understanding of his character.

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

Question 2

(a) Successful responses focused on the staging of this moment, with the drumming in the background creating an ever-building source of tension and foreboding, particularly as its meaning is not understood, even by Joseph. Pilkings was seen by many as a thoroughly unlikeable character, rigid in his beliefs and someone who cannot comprehend any sort of validity in others' beliefs, thus foreshadowing later events in the play. His abrupt orders were shown to build the tension, for example, '*Oh, get back to the kitchen!*' along with his religious insults to Joseph, '*holy water nonsense'*. The clash between him and his staff was understood to show his stress and tension in this moment, with the confusion between him and Joseph in this moment adding to the pressure to discover the reason for the drumming. Some responses focused on Pilkings' impatience with Joseph owing to his selfish desire to ensure the party was not disturbed regardless of what the drumming symbolised. Candidates also understood that there is conflict between Jane and Pilkings which demonstrates the creation of tension in this moment. This is shown in their language: '*you're being ridiculous'*, '*nonsense*', *'blustering'*. Successful responses understood that Pilkings is under pressure to decide what to do about the report of Elesin's suicide, and that this causes tension as his main priority is to go to the ball which the prince will be attending.

Less successful responses showed limited engagement with the passage and tended to rely on narrative. These responses did not progress beyond commenting about Simon insulting Joseph and did not consider Jane's contribution to the passage and the context.

(b) There was some understanding of the relationship between Iyaloja and Elesin and how it changes, with Iyaloja's respect for Elesin at the beginning of the play turning to anger and contempt when he fails to commit ritual suicide as required in the Yoruba culture. Similarly, the change in atmosphere from the light-hearted, friendly atmosphere at the start changes upon an ominous warning of failure from Iyaloja. Iyaloja's role in guiding and assisting Elesin in the death ritual was understood, with many candidates being able to support their ideas with detailed references to the text.

Weaker responses lacked detailed textual support and development and some candidates, having shown a good understanding of the relationship at the beginning of the play, failed to fully address Iyaloja's anger and outrage towards Elesin when he fails to complete the ritual at the end of the play.

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: *A Streetcar Named Desire*

Question 3

(a) This was a very popular choice of text and question. The most successful responses contextualised the passage as following on from Blanche's failed birthday supper and from Stanley's revelations to Mitch about Blanche's past. They understood that Blanche feels that Mitch is her only hope of securing a future and that as a result there is a sense of desperation here. Mitch has come to accuse Blanche of lying but she is hoping to repair their relationship. Therefore, the seeds of conflict are already in place and it is clear that the previously amiable Mitch now holds more power in the relationship due to Stanley's influence. Many responses picked up on Blanche's reliance on alcohol and her pretence of not knowing where the bottle of liquor is, and there was much comment on the '*wild-cat'* image used by Mitch about Blanche's consumption of alcohol. Candidates understood how she is trying to maintain her image of purity and giving people what she thinks they want-an idealised version of herself rather than the reality. Candidates understood the foreshadowing of this; that her refusal to deal with reality leads to her breakdown.

Conflict in Mitch's growing anger towards Blanche was identified, such as his words '*I've never had a real good look at you'* and how he '*grunts*' and looks at her '*contemptuously'*. The contrast between this approach and his previous polite and considerate character and adoration of her was explored and candidates often referenced the auditory imagery in relation to Mitch grunting, further linking this to his increasingly animalistic attitude towards her. This change in his character was explored by many strong responses, and it was noted that his loyalties and attitudes have become

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more aligned with Stanley's aggressive, confrontational character. The light and dark imagery was explored in most responses, with the understanding of Blanche's fear of being seen in bright light, so that she can avoid the harsh reality of her life for a little longer, maintaining her illusion of beauty, youth and innocence. The symbolism of Mitch tearing the paper lantern and exposing Blanche's lies was discussed, along with the irony that it was he who originally put up the lantern at Blanche's request. Blanche's remark, *'I do not want realism'*, and her wish for '*magic'* rather than truth was perceptively identified as a rare example of Blanche being honest with Mitch, and with herself.

Less successful responses did not show understanding of the context of the passage and so were not able to explore the full implications of Blanche and Mitch's conversation. Despite this, these responses were able to identify the symbolism of the light and paper lantern but often showed limited coverage of the passage and drifted into narrative, with little direct textual support. Many responses commented on the contrast between Mitch's short, blunt utterances with Blanche's rambling speech, but supporting textual examples were rarely provided. Responses which centred mainly on Blanche were often self-limiting.

(b) The vast majority of candidates who responded to this question agreed with the statement that Stella is too good for Stanley owing to his dominant nature and aggressive behaviour towards her. Successful responses focused on Stella and Blanche's upbringing and the higher social status that Stella holds in comparison with Stanley, who was born to an immigrant Polish family and classes himself as '*common as dirt'*, while at the same time demanding to be seen as the '*King around here'*. The couple's morals and personalities were discussed, with Stella's kindness and consideration for others being presented as a reason why she is too good for Stanley, in contrast to his rude and domineering manner. The animal imagery that is used by the two women about Stanley was highlighted as another reason why Stella could be classed as superior to him, particularly Blanche's criticisms of him, calling him an '*animal*', and '*ape-like'*. Some responses balanced these observations with criticism of Stella, believing that in not challenging Stanley's behaviour, staying with him after he is violent towards her and not acknowledging that she believes Blanche's claim that Stanley raped her, she is enabling his behaviour and lowering herself to his level. It was understood that a reason for this is that Stella's sexual desires are stronger than her response to Stanley's abuse but that the intense desire that binds the couple co-exists with violence.

Stella's decision to choose Stanley over Blanche at the end of the play was given by some candidates as a reason to disagree with the statement 'Stella is too good for Stanley', and that Stella lowers herself to Stanley's level by making this choice. Insightful responses discussed the idea of Stella being just as pragmatic and realistic as her husband. In choosing Stanley over Blanche, some responses argued that she took the most optimal choice in terms of her own stability, therefore making her morally questionable. Likewise, there were comments on Stella matching Stanley's primal instincts and desires whilst ignoring the toxicity of their relationship and therefore reaching the conclusion that she was not 'too good for Stanley'.

There was also recognition that at the end of the play Stanley's limitations as a husband are clear and that all he can offer Stella is physical comfort.

Less successful responses tended to drift into lengthy discussion of 1950s America and male domination of society. They often discussed Blanche in detail, losing sight of Stella and lacked consideration of Stella and Stanley's backgrounds and their differing social classes. These responses made superficial comments about the relationship, understanding the desire at the heart of it, but lacking support or development. However, the majority of candidates recognised the brutality of Stanley and could support their views to some extent.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

Question 4

(a) Successful responses set the passage in context, understanding that it follows on from the complications in the plot created by Puck's interference. They understood Puck's delight in the deception of the two Athenian men in this passage: that he mimics their voices and intends to tire them out so that they will sleep in order for him to remove the effects of the love potion from Lysander allowing him to wake and be in love with Hermia again. There was some worthwhile comment on the drama created by Puck and his mischief within the passage with many candidates

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mentioning his imitation of Demetrius and the ensuing action. They referenced the dramatic irony of this moment, with the audience having an overview of the tangled situation but with the two men being oblivious.

There was some analysis of the language used by Puck and Oberon at the start of the passage, with the contrasting images of Puck's '*black-brow'd night'*, '*Damned spirits'* and '*wormy beds'* and Oberon's '*fair blessed beams'* and '*yellow gold'*. This was interpreted as illustrating Puck's mischief and Oberon's welcoming of the dawn and his wish to create order. There was also some worthwhile comment on Puck's chanting and his pleasure in casting a spell. Puck's insults used to Demetrius and Lysander were commented on, such as '*villain'*, '*coward*' and *'thou child*'. And it was understood that he is challenging the men's honour. The effect of the setting of the passage in the forest before dawn was discussed, with focus on the dramatic impact of lines such as '*night's swift dragons'* and '*Aurora's harbinger'.*

Weaker responses lacked understanding of the passage's context with many thinking that Oberon is about to play the trick on Titania; some thought Puck had to remove the potion from her eyes. These less successful responses did not cover the passage thoroughly, often with little or no comment on the opening dialogue between Puck and Oberon, moving straight onto the later section of the passage involving Puck's teasing of Demetrius and Lysander but with little progression beyond identifying some of the insults they use. Some responses understood the need for haste in rectifying the confusion between the Lovers, and overall, the majority of candidates understood the way that Puck is mimicking the men and tormenting them, even if comments were not fully supported or developed. There was some misunderstanding of Puck's tone, thinking that he is trying to calm and soothe the men with his words.

(b) Successful responses commented on the Mechanicals as individuals, their roles in the play and their actual performances. There was response to their language and their comedic value to the play, with particular focus on Bottom as an important comic figure. Candidates understood that the Mechanicals are simple men when compared with the duke but that they are all skilled in their own fields. They had knowledge of the play which is to be performed at the wedding of Theseus and Hippolyta and there was some focus on the rehearsals. They understood the comic relief that the Mechanicals add to the play with their unintentional humour, slapstick and physical comedy and that although they are well-meaning and enthusiastic, their acting skills leave a lot to be desired. Most of the focus in responses was on Bottom, commenting on his over-confidence in wanting to play all the roles, his misunderstandings and mispronunciations and the transformation with the ass's head. There was understanding that the Mechanicals are seen as stupid by Puck, but that Theseus values their loyalty and decency. The endearing nature and sincerity of the mechanicals was noted by many candidates and how this factor contributed to making them 'striking' characters within the play.

Some less successful responses did not progress beyond the episode of Bottom's transformation with an ass's head, and the other Mechanicals were almost ignored. Some responses misunderstood the term 'Mechanicals' and focused on the mechanics of the play in general with some general comments on language and structure. Some candidates confused the Mechanicals with the fairies, and classed Puck as a Mechanical. Understanding of the group of characters was often insecure, with thin outlines of the Mechanicals' role in the play. These responses often identified the comic role of the Mechanicals in the play but lacked textual support. They often relied heavily on narrative and there was little focus on the episode between Bottom and Titania.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Antony and Cleopatra*

Question 5

(a) The passage gave candidates the chance to engage with a powerful and emotional moment as Antony dies. Successful responses contextualised this moment as following on from Cleopatra hiding in her monument and pretending to commit suicide after deserting Antony's fleet and fearing his consequent anger. Antony has fatally wounded himself in a suicide attempt and asks to be taken to her. Whilst some responses merely described the scene others demonstrated their knowledge in terms of it being a turning point in the play with Antony's death setting the path for Cleopatra's suicide, amplifying the power of the scene. Candidates recognised that Antony considers himself '*The greatest prince of the world'* and wishes to be remembered as honourable. They referenced his use of *'Egypt'* in place of Cleopatra's name, but few developed this idea which acknowledges her status.

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Less successful responses struggled to engage with the language of the passage and understanding was not secure. They did not set the passage in context and often mistakenly thought that Antony is calling himself a coward, when in fact he is remembering his great deeds and wishing to be remembered as a '*prince*'. They did not progress beyond identifying that Antony dies, with little coverage or understanding of Cleopatra's words following his death.

(b) The majority of responses focused on Caesar and Enobarbus. Successful responses were able to focus on Caesar's sense of honour and duty to Rome, and his harsh language and judgement of Antony in '*He hath given his empire/Up to a whore'*. They commented on his sense of honour and respect for Antony and Cleopatra when they die, with some speculating on how genuine this sorrow is and to what extent it is politically performative rather than genuine grief. Strong responses were able to consider not only Caesar's sense of honour but also his political manoeuvring and manipulation of people. There were some insightful comments on Enobarbus' sense of honour, his personal integrity, loyalty and sense of shame. This level of response engaged successfully with his devoted service to Antony, which makes his own dishonourable desertion unbearable to him, compounded when Antony nobly sends him his treasure. His lines such as '*I will go seek/Some ditch wherein to die'* and '*I am alone the villain of the earth*.' were explored and understood to show his dramatic distress. Candidates who chose to write about Pompey identified his moral integrity, with most noting his honourable decision not to attack the triumvirs while they sleep. Strong responses discussed how he fights for Rome and his reputation and has legitimate grievances. However, even strong responses had a tendency to lose focus on the named characters and drift into discussion of Antony. These responses, although showing an overall understanding of the importance of honour to Caesar often lacked discussion of his hypocritical betrayal of Lepidus and ruthless attack on Pompey.

Less successful responses were uneven, with the majority of the discussion based on only one character, and only a few comments on the second; or with only one character being discussed. Many candidates struggled to remain focused on the named characters and instead drifted into often detailed discussion of Antony or of the theme of honour in general. Most could identify Caesar's honour as a Roman, Pompey's honour in not assassinating the visitors to his ship, and Enobarbus's honour and loyalty to Antony but they did not develop these ideas. Discussion of Caesar's honour was often directed solely towards Antony and how Caesar judges his dishonourable behaviour when he ignores his duty to Rome due to his love for Cleopatra. Responses were able to identify Caesar's outward stance for what is honourable and dutiful, but few focused on the deeds which reflect his lack of honour, such as betraying Lepidus and attacking Pompey. Some responses incorrectly stated that Caesar is cold and emotionless, expressing no emotion when Antony and Cleopatra die.

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LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 0475/31
Drama (Open Text)

Key messages

- Opening paragraphs should be brief, address the key terms of the question and avoid plot summaries, or listing themes or techniques to be addressed in the essay. Effective introductions concisely outline the points to be covered in the following response, demonstrating question focus and planning.
- Textual reference and quotations should support ideas, be relevant, brief, and analysed fully. Commenting on quotations or punctuation chosen at random, without exploring the context and linking it to the question, is unlikely to be rewarded.
- Candidates should base their writing on the printed text studied and not on film versions of the texts which may veer from the original.
- An awareness of the text as drama and a personal engagement with the impact of the play onstage are essential qualities of successful responses.

General comments

Many candidates had a sound grasp of the plots of their chosen texts, showing familiarity with key moments, and engaging with the characters and their relationships. This enabled them to select relevant material and provide precise substantiation. There were responses seen to all texts with *A Street Car Named Desire* and *A Taste of Honey* the most popular. Centres are reminded that *Death and the King's Horseman* will be replaced on the set syllabus texts in 2026, by Pearl Cleage's *Blues for an Alabama Sky.*

In this series, fewer introductory paragraphs featured lengthy context or background material. However, many introductions did list literary features or themes to be discussed, often ones not particularly relevant to the question, and which then sometimes did not appear in the essay, wasting valuable time.

The most successful responses were clearly structured, with focused introductions, logically developed paragraphs, and relevant conclusions. This clarity of organisation helped sustain convincing arguments. Successful responses maintained focus on the precise terms of the question throughout, selecting the most relevant material to answer the question. The choice of the appropriate 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. With the extract questions, which were the most commonly answered across the paper, the weaker answers tended to include prepared material on key themes or characters without either explaining their significance for the question set or identifying where they actually appeared in the given extract. The more successful responses engaged thoughtfully with the emotional experiences of characters, helping them to shape personal and evaluative responses to the drama, expressing how moments were moving, humorous or revealing for them as an audience. When supported with textual detail, this personal engagement strengthened the overall quality of the response.

In this series there was some evidence of candidates having little knowledge or understanding of the studied text, reflected in the confusion between characters' names, inaccuracies in plot details and even confusion over a character's gender. Many responses were extremely brief with a very narrow range of reference and therefore little to credit. There was also an increase in blank responses where candidates had not attempted the question at all, as well as several rubric infringements on Paper 2 where candidates answered two passage-based or two discursive questions. In this case, both essays were marked but only the higher mark awarded. Centres are reminded to refer to the syllabus requirements at the start of the course and for teachers to familiarise themselves with the precise examination requirements of the syllabus, to avoid candidates incurring rubric penalties. A significant number of candidates treated **Question 3(b)** as a combination of the essay prompt and the extract, writing about Blanche's breakdown with reference to the extract only (for which it provided very little evidence). These were marked instead as **Question 3(a)** if this gave an opportunity for higher reward.

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A significant number of responses relied heavily on retelling events, showing knowledge but lacking analysis of how the playwright shaped meaning and impact. There was an increase in answers without any supporting evidence, just assertions. Candidates should remember that narrative and assertion is unlikely to receive high reward. In many cases references to the text were either too general or there was no exploration of the reference which weakened the persuasiveness of the argument. There were missed opportunities to analyse imagery, symbolism, tone, and distinctive speech patterns, or to explore how dialogue and stage directions shape meaning and audience response. Many could have been improved by a less narrow range of reference and further analysis of the textual details which would show understanding of the playwright's craft.

An awareness that these texts are written to be performed onstage informed the most successful answers. They referred to the 'audience' rather than 'reader' and the 'play' rather than 'book'. They were able to explore stagecraft and the authors' methods to convey the main concerns of their chosen texts and to outline their own, or propose other audience members', responses. Candidates frequently overlooked how character relationships are revealed through staging, movement, use of props, sound or silence, which limited the dramatic depth of their analysis. The best responses 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, is unproductive. Any comment on the use of exclamation marks or punctuation has to be analysed in context otherwise the comment is meaningless. Candidates are reminded not to refer to line numbers instead of quoting from the text as this limits opportunities for analysis of the ways writers achieve effects.

Weaker responses offered straightforward moral judgements about characters (for example, labelling them as wholly good or bad) without acknowledging complexity, contradiction, or development within the play. Others had an insecure grasp of context, judging events through a purely moral lens rather than considering the contextual framework. Stronger answers were able to use context productively and demonstrate their understanding of the wider play and its concerns, but without losing focus on the extract or question. It was, however, still rare to find answers which were informed by a knowledge of what happened immediately before or after the given extract, for example Theseus' predictably positive response to the mechanicals' play in the extract given his determination, shortly beforehand, to choose it for the wedding entertainment.

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 and in the argument being presented.

Comments on specific questions

SHELAGH DELANEY: *A Taste of Honey*

Question 1

(a) Generally, candidates had a good understanding of the dysfunctional relationship between Jo and Helen and with some awareness of the context of the passage. Many responses addressed the changing relationship, Helen's attempts to prove Jo needs her and Jo's determination to prove her independence and reject offers of help. Most were alert to Jo's sarcasm and the tell-tale sign that she called her Helen instead of Mother.

The stronger responses explored the irony of Helen's critical comments on Jo's plans for motherhood, her attempts to change the subject from her own failed relationship and the drama of their dialogue. These responses questioned the reasons for Helen's return as being more self-seeking than truly caring, and some addressed her frank admission to her flaws, forgetting her daughter when snatching moments of happiness, or tastes of honey, 'while (they) lasted'. There were some thoughtful comments on the metaphor of the title and Helen's unconvincing protests that she was not hurt by Peter's desertion.

Many candidates recognised Jo's scepticism, her exaggeratedly assured stance ('we're wonderful!'), articulating her experience of neglect and emotional insecurity and growing self-awareness and resilience ('I could take care of you'). The strongest made careful reference to the text, the significance of Geof providing the cot, Jo's curt 'we like it' and assertive claim to her own flat, but perhaps the weak foundation to her claims of self-sufficiency. They developed this with reference to patterns of behaviour being repeated, cemented by Jo's comment of being 'back to

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where we started'. More developed answers recognised how accusatory questions, sharp retorts and insults ('that throwback') create tension and expose unresolved resentment between mother and daughter.

Weaker responses summarised the exchange or referred to Helen's neglect as a whole, with less close focus on the text and there were some misunderstandings. A number of candidates offered blunt judgements about either character without sufficient reference to the text, labelling Helen as loving with no ulterior motives, and Jo as a rude and insensitive daughter. Precise textual support was often lacking.

(b) Most candidates argued that Boy was a likeable character. There was an understanding of him treating Jo well, his consideration when she is ill, and wanting to marry her, his caring gestures such as offering her a toy car and his 'soul' and the romance of his giving her a ring. A few had access to such details of the text and his professions of love but most responses remained at a basic, generalised level.

The few stronger responses addressed Boy's impact on Jo, in contrast to Helen and Peter, keeping her spirits up through his friendly and cheerful personality and in turn lifting the mood of the play, making him likeable to the audience. They picked up the banter and playful dialogue. Some stronger responses explored Boy's ethnicity and how this is treated in the play, discussing the candid way in which he describes the prejudice he has experienced and his surprised admiration of Jo's equanimity. Some usefully tied in social context, the stigma and social judgements that underpin interracial relationships, his concerns that Helen might not accept him, seeing him only as a 'coloured boy', borne out by her later comments. Some discussed how his positive qualities, in the face of the evident racism he has encountered, make him sympathetic and likeable.

Few candidates discussed Boy's less likeable characteristics, his casual attitude to Jo and her feeling that he would inevitably disappear. Some drew on the reputation of sailors with girls in every port, and his taking advantage of a vulnerable schoolgirl. The few stronger responses considered Jo's own thoughts showing how her judgement of Boy becomes more qualified, as revealed in her later comment to Geof, doubting whether the relationship revealed 'much about love' and the wry 'he came in with Christmas and out with the new year', contributing significantly to the theme of abandonment.

There were a significant number of misreadings, candidates referring to Jo in the passage as 'Boy', reading the question as *how are male characters presented*, without reference to Boy himself, or writing about Geof instead. Other basic responses gave a generalised account of his loving treatment of Jo but without close reference and without considering the implications of his absence from the later play and the effect this has on Jo's plight.

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

Question 2

(a) Most candidates understood Pilkings' mistrust of Elesin, Elesin's bitterness in return and Iyaloja's contempt for Elesin. This was not, however, supported by much relevant textual detail. Nearly all candidates referenced Pilkings' superior and dismissive attitude towards Yoruba culture though very few discussed the ways in which his actions could be driven by his moral beliefs. Often candidates saw Pilkings as very much to blame for what had happened to Elesin and the discussion was skewed towards the effects of colonial rule without a clear focus on the task or this particular extract.

The best answers discussed how Soyinka used vivid language and imagery throughout the extract to convey characters' thoughts and feelings. They commented on the power imbalance created by Pilkings' control and his threatening promise to keep Elesin under scrutiny, after failing to impose his notion of 'honour'. Stronger responses explored the emotional violence of Iyaloja's language, the repeated rhetorical question 'who are you?' and direct speech 'no, you said' to powerfully drive home Elesin's betrayal. The extended use of natural imagery (the plantain stem, seed) was explored as well as the accusation that Elesin's 'self-vaunted' bravery was 'hollow' and nothing but 'words', conveying moral judgement. They showed understanding of Yoruban values and how these shape the emotional intensity of the scene, Iyaloja speaking on behalf of the community who had had such faith in Elesin. One high achieving response understood how Soyinka powerfully conveys feelings of betrayal in the reference to the sweetmeats and privileges bestowed on Elesin

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only to be met by his failure to act as the 'hunter who brought the quarry down'. The strongest recognised the complexity of Elesin's thoughts and feelings: his blame of Pilkings and the 'masters in this land' and helplessness ('I could do nothing'), alongside self-awareness and shame ('I more than deserve your scorn').' The complex and conflicting notions of honour, trust and betrayal were noted, along with the implications of this moment for all parties.

Weaker responses attempted to rephrase the dialogue or tended to concentrate mainly, or exclusively, on the feelings of Elesin and Pilings and said little, if anything, about Iyaloja and the response of the Yoruba community to Elesin's failure. Whilst figures of speech and metaphor were sometimes identified, for example 'the eagle he promised he would confront', they were often not fully understood.

(b) All candidates who answered this question were able to make some relevant comments on the character of Olunde. Most explored the fact that Olunde is the only Yoruban character in the play who has experience and understanding of both Western and Yoruba culture, acting as a bridge between the two and how this makes him, to some extent, a sympathetic character since he allows the audience to 'see both sides'.

Some of the stronger responses referred to Olunde's calm and reasoned discussion with Jane Pilkings in which he declares his gratitude for what he learned in England but emphasises the importance of honour and duty in the Yoruban tradition. His comments on sacrifice and Jane's hypocrisy also enable the audience to see this tradition more objectively. A few cited the reasoned but ominous dialogue between Jane and Olunde in Scene 4 on suicide and the sacrifice of one to benefit the many, anticipating his final actions. They explored his decision to choose honourable sacrifice for the good of his people and discussed how this made him a sympathetic character, especially since he made clear that he sought sympathy from nobody. Some sympathised that his promising life is cut short, he had to take on this role long before he should have, before he could fulfil the aims of his medical vocation. The most successful responses anchored comments to details and dramatic effects, for example the tangible shame he feels when discovering his father's failure, conveyed in his stillness on stage and his curt rejection of Elesin ('I have no father, eater of left-overs'). One observed that, through Iyaloja, Soyinka suggests Olunde is honourable to sacrifice his life, as preordained, for the good of his people, but to Pilkings, Olunde's suicide is incomprehensible, meaning that audience sympathy may be conflicted, depending on our response to these characters. Interestingly, the shocking revelation of Olunde's corpse and the effect this has on the characters on stage, particularly Elesin, and the audience, did not feature in responses.

Weaker responses were narrative in approach with very little textual support or comment on language and effects. Some featured assertions that Olunde failed to find acceptance in Britain or his homeland and prejudice from his own people.

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: *A Streetcar Named Desire*

Question 3

(a) This was the most popular question with much rich material to explore. Most responses identified some key revelations in the scene, demonstrating an understanding of Stanley's rude assertion of authority and the signs of attraction between Blanche and Mitch. Stronger responses were able to consider wider textual issues such as Blanche's genteel expectations of courtesy met with Stanley's deliberate display of coarseness and casual violence, exposing his ownership of Stella. Some related this usefully to historical context, the Old South values coming into conflict with New America. Others insightfully discussed Stanley's power over all present, not simply the 'women', speaking on behalf of the men ('no one's going to get up') and establishing the poker game as strictly male-only territory and himself as the alpha. Many identified the laughter as revealing camaraderie and that such behaviour is normalised. Many considered the motif of Blanche's desire to cleanse herself ('again'), the stronger ones seeing this in context of Stanley's ill-mannered treatment and her 'nerves' exposed by this hostile environment.

There was some insightful discussion of Stella's unease and verbal protest, recognising her willingness to retreat rather than further challenge Stanley, revealing her emotional dependence and complicity. Her blindness to his flaws, and clear admiration ('look at him') was contrasted with Blanche's sarcastic tone in the 'stamp of genius' comment. Several responses usefully linked such revelations to later conflicts and developments, particularly Stanley's escalating aggression, Stella's loyalty to Stanley and Blanche's vulnerability and attempt to challenge her sister. Most

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considered Blanche's response to Mitch, with more developed responses exploring Blanche's immediate interest as a sign of her desire for protection and stability, evidenced by her concern for his prospects ('is that something much'). The strongest saw significance in this meeting being staged separate from the hostile masculine pack, his 'awkward courtesy', polite address 'Miss Dubois' and his maternal care justifying Blanche's appraisal of him as 'sensitive' and 'different'. One interpreted the hesitation in Blanche's description of Mitch as '– superior' as revealing the desperate and fragile nature of her hopes of a match. Other varied responses saw revealing characterisation in Stanley's initial controlling inquiry ('where you been?'), Blanche's lack of interest in Mitch's sick mother and her disregard of Stella's discomfort, prioritising her own.

Weaker responses tended to offer a narrative response, paraphrasing the passage or repeating prepared material relating to Stanley as primal, and overlooking the more subtle details of the interactions between the characters. There was misunderstanding of Blanche's question about Mitch as a 'wolf'; many were led into zoological speculations about his ability to hunt in packs or mate for life. There was little focus on language beyond the stage direction of the dramatic slap and the 'certain interest' shown by Mitch and Blanche, seen by many to reveal 'love at first sight'.

(b) There were some excellent responses with a sound and sensitive understanding of the factors that influenced Blanche's mental state throughout the play, culminating in the final scenes. There was a good response to stagecraft here, including recurring symbols of lighting, music and bathing. Most candidates explored how Blanche's ongoing clashes with Stanley affected her relationship with both Stella and Mitch, and the horror of the ending of the play. The stronger responses moved beyond a recount of events and were able to track key stages in Blanche's deterioration over the course of the play, judiciously incorporating key references to dramatic effects. They demonstrated understanding of Blanche's collapse as a slow psychological unravelling shaped by repeated trauma and loss. Some better responses noted the significance of the title and Blanche's destination being dramatically foreshadowed. There was also understanding of early indications in Blanche's instability and hidden drinking and the use of contrasting costume to indicate her delusions of grandeur and later disintegration. The strongest analysed the final scenes, the drama of her response to Mitch's rejection, alongside Stanley's brutal verbal and physical assault and her final poignant exit from the stage. The most successful answers balanced sympathy with critical insight, showing clear understanding of her flaws and self-deception, acknowledging that Blanche's illusions function as a coping mechanism, helping her endure emotional pain rather than simply a way of deceiving others.

Some of the weaker responses struggled with the word 'dramatically' and lapsed into narrative, recalling Blanche's life-story from the death of her husband to being taken to the asylum but without differentiating between what is experienced on stage and what is reported by Blanche or Stanley. Others focused solely on the end of the play without reference to signs of her emotional fragility or labelled Blanche as 'mad' without examining how Williams dramatises her decline. Some made dismissive judgements, reducing Blanche's suffering to personal weakness only.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE*: A Midsummer's Night Dream*

Question 4

(a) Candidates engaged well with both the question and this moment in the play. They recognised the mechanicals' lack of dramatic experience and most grasped the context of a play performed for the wedding of the courtiers and their commentary on it. Most candidates discussed the decision to have an actor portray Wall, his over-explanatory lines, his actions and interaction with the 'lovers', as a source of much physical and verbal humour. Many responses discussed the mechanicals' failure to understand the protocols of a dramatic performance, for example breaking the fourth wall. Stronger answers were able to pinpoint different humorous elements: mispronounced words, the running joke of Ninus being reduced to 'Ninny', Bottom's anxiety to prove the performers' skill to the Duke, the repeated and over-exaggerated exclamations, the misused classical references and heavy-handed rhyming in the script. Some were able to relate these to deeper implications and ideas in the play, such as metatheatre, the differing classes and educational abilities of those classes, and the ironic echoes of the main play's plot and characters, as well as the gloriously inappropriateness of the play as a wedding entertainment.

A few considered the context of the scene and the audience's expectations given the rehearsals and the nature of Bottom's over-confident character or recognising that it came as a relief after all the conflict in the forest. Others insightfully and precisely noted the parallels between the problems

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and silly behaviour of Pyramus and Thisbe and the lovers in the forest, separated by a father, and therefore the irony of the latters' criticism. However, very few could make sense of Theseus and the courtiers' comments, apart from Hippolyta's line about the silliness of it and this was only used to acknowledge it was a silly play.

There were issues over misreading of 'eyen' as a mistake by Bottom rather than the archaic plural term for eyes or the use of a young man to play a female role considered hilarious but not recognised as a convention of the time. Weaker answers made general assertions about the ineptitude of the mechanicals and the annoyance of their audience, without closely illustrating the former or distinguishing between the responses of the courtiers. Many relied heavily on the comic potential of the Wall, restricting the scope of their response, or struggled to develop points, particularly when discussing language. Very often candidates found it difficult to go beyond asserting that the scene was funny.

(b) Although there was some understanding of the character, the responses tended to be quite narrative, showing knowledge of some events but with very little comment on language and the drama of Oberon's control.

Most answers were able to identify Oberon as the king of the fairies (a few confused him with Theseus) and referred to how his desire for control led him to badgering Titania to give him her 'changeling boy'. Stronger responses used multiple moments beyond this encounter, considering his orders to Puck, his pleasure in 'torment(ing)' Titania and attempt to control Demetrius' feelings for Helena. Many successfully made reference to gender politics and his problematic desire for mastery as Titania's 'lord', relating this to other examples of patriarchal control in the wider play, but retaining the main focus on the question of Oberon. A few engaged with the ill effects of Oberon's actions on the weather and natural world and the jealousy demonstrated in his comments about her relationship with Theseus and 'the hateful fool' Bottom. The most successful employed details such as his provocative and manipulative tone ('Give me that boy and I will go with thee), his manner of ordering and blaming Puck ('fetch me' 'this is thy negligence'), his boastful knowledge of the flower ('I saw, but thou couldst not'). Most ignored his sympathy for Helena and, interestingly, none considered Oberon's role in bringing about the resolution and harmony at the end of the play, the happier outcomes of his magical interference in mortal affairs.

Weaker responses had narrow range or focused solely on his interaction with Titania, offering very limited textual support and neglecting Oberon's role in the wider play. The interference in the love lives of Demetrius and Lysander was seen just as interference and given as an example that Oberon wanted to 'control' everything. There was little sense of either the humiliating or comical outcomes of his magical interference and very little comment on language.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE*: Antony and Cleopatra*

Question 5

(a) Successful responses considered the 'intrigue', in particular that created by Cleopatra's response to Thyreus. Thyreus's desire to speak in private with Cleopatra ('hear it apart') was used to evidence mystery and create a sense of secrecy but there was often limited comment on language. Stronger responses established the context to the moment and Caesar's attempts to manipulate Cleopatra and the uncertainty created by her apparent submission and calculated ambiguity. Stronger responses discussed the language Cleopatra uses about Caesar and the significance of her offering Thyreus her hand, exploring whether her behaviour represents an earnest or strategic betrayal of Antony. Discussion of Thyreus' language was also a discriminator of better answers. Some stronger answers discussed the uncertainty of Enobarbus losing faith with Antony and the significance of his asides, giving an intriguing glimpse of his inner turmoil and suggesting future developments. One used Enobarbus's judgement of 'thy dearest quit thee' as an indicator that both he and Cleopatra will desert, feeding into the theme of shifting loyalty. The drama of Antony's entrance and response to Cleopatra's seeming betrayal was discussed by some and others commented on the intensity of Antony's fury but without reference to 'intrigue'. Only a few engaged with his realisation 'authority melts from me', his attempt to re-assert his power and how this may cause the audience to wonder if this is beyond him.

Weaker responses focused on plot with simple paraphrase of the passage and with limited response to language or effects and with misunderstanding. Some weaker responses included lengthy contextual information regarding the current status of the relationships of Caesar, Antony

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and Cleopatra, but with scant focus on the extract itself and there was often limited grasp of the word 'Intriguing'. Alternatively, the context of the moment was missing and Antony was seen as purely jealous.

(b) The most popular moments chosen were: the wounding of Antony, his death, Cleopatra's suicide and Enobarbus's remorse. Many candidates seemed rather unsure how to approach the question and wrote about how they personally felt about particular characters but did not always explore the significance of the chosen moment in the wider play or moved beyond moments to large sections of the play. Stronger responses were able to go beyond a personal response or basic points regarding death being 'moving' to demonstrate how emotional impact is created through language and staging. The best answers discussed the language of the moments they chose and explored in detail what it revealed about the characters and why its dramatic impact made it moving in the context of the wider play, relating to the themes such as political loss, love, honour and loyalty.

Weaker responses tended to write narratively with an element of personal response but without analysis. Many lacked any textual detail or quotation and were repetitive. Many strayed well beyond 'moments' to cover large sections of the play which conveyed how characters were portrayed.

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LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 0475/32
Drama (Open Text)

Key messages

- Opening paragraphs should be brief, address the key terms of the question and avoid plot summaries, or listing the writer's techniques to be addressed in the essay.
- Textual reference and quotations should support ideas, be relevant, brief, and should be analysed fully demonstrating how the reference supports the point. Commenting on quotations chosen at random or punctuation, without exploring the context and linking it to the question, is unlikely to be rewarded.
- Candidates should base their writing on the printed text studied and not on film or stage versions of the texts.
- 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

The majority of candidates had a sound grasp of the plots of their chosen texts and engaged with the characters and their relationships. There were responses seen to all texts with *A Street Car Named Desire,* A Midsummer Night's Dream and *Death and the King's Horseman* equally popular across components. Whilst there were more responses seen to Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* and Shelagh Delaney's, *A Taste of Honey* than in the summer series, there were still relatively fewer responses to these texts. Centres are reminded that *Death and the King's Horseman* will be replaced on the set syllabus texts in 2026, by Pearl Cleage's *Blues for an Alabama Sky.*

There were fewer answers giving lengthy context or background material in the introductory paragraph. However, many introductions did give a list of literary features or themes they were going to discuss – often ones which were not particularly relevant to the question- and then did not mention or explore them at all in the answer. This wastes valuable time in an examination of 45 minutes per question. There is still the desire to spot a theme at the end of every paragraph and this is a major distraction in less successful answers as candidates tend to lose focus on the actual terms of the question. Stronger candidates write with an integrated thematic awareness.

There was some evidence of a few candidates having little knowledge or understanding of the printed text with frequent references made to films and stage productions, not always faithful to the texts. The lack of knowledge of texts was also reflected in the confusion between characters' names, inaccuracies in plot details and even confusion over whether the character was male or female. Amongst these was confusion over Delaney's character, Jo, seen by some characters to be male, perhaps evidence that the passage was attempted as an unseen text, rather than the text having been studied in depth.

The most successful responses focused on the precise terms of the question and maintained that focus throughout, selecting the most appropriate, relevant material to answer the question. A few candidates did not read **Question 1(b)** carefully, ignoring the rider which clearly stated: 'Do **not** use the passage in **Question 1(a)** in answering this question.' Answers which ignored this and based their answers wholly or partly on the passage were self-penalising as material taken from the passage could not be rewarded.

There was an increase in answers without any supporting evidence, just assertions. Candidates should remember that narrative and assertion is unlikely to receive high reward. Ideas should be supported by close reference to the text or the use of brief quotation which should be analysed and linked to the point being made, or to the question. In some cases even when answers referred to the text, there was no effort to explore the reference and sometimes, direct quotation was not even acknowledged by the use of quotations marks.

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Listing literary features as a way in which a passage was, for example, 'dramatic' or 'revealing', is 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. Candidates are reminded not to refer to line numbers instead of quoting from the text as this limits opportunities for analysis of the ways writers achieve effects.

An awareness that these texts are written to be performed onstage informed the most successful answers. They referred to the 'audience' rather than 'reader' and the 'play' rather than 'novel', 'text' or 'book'. They were able to explore stagecraft and the authors' methods to convey the main concerns of their chosen texts and to outline their own, or propose other audience members', responses. The best responses 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, is unproductive. Punctuation is relevant in so far as it organises speech but is only relevant if context and content and effect are included. Exclamation marks cannot be seen by an audience and not all exclamation marks mean that the character shouts that line. Any comment on the use of exclamation marks or punctuation has to be analysed in context otherwise the comment is meaningless.

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 and in the argument being presented.

Comments on specific questions

SHELAGH DELANEY: *A Taste of Honey*

Question 1

(a) The passage vividly presents the characters, Helen and Jo, and successful answers engaged enthusiastically with the dialogue to explore elements of both characters. There was understanding of what an audience would find striking in the unconventional nature of the mother/daughter relationship. Helen was often better understood with her selfishness and irresponsibility. Reactions to Jo varied with some more sympathetic and others unimpressed by her disaffected and negative attitude. Better responses explored how Jo's attempts to come across as independently minded might in fact be a kind of defence mechanism. Many candidates, given certain anglicisms and colloquialism, were less successful at grasping the banter and the humour, taking some of the characters' lines at face value. Some thought Helen saying, *'I can not bear to be parted from you'* was a sign of actual love for Jo, while others said it was sarcastic and even irritating that she was so unconcerned about anything Jo wanted or wished for. The most successful answers saw the symbolism in the setting as representing Helen's neglect and their dysfunctional relationship. Most candidates responded to the parent/child relationship identifying poverty as an important aspect of their life.

Weaker responses struggled to understand the language and sarcasm of the dialogue, commenting on their close relationship reflected in them '*sharing a bed again*'. The passage was retold or paraphrased with little understanding of the relationship. They tended to over-state two things: that Helen is an alcoholic and a prostitute. Delaney describes Helen as a 'semi-whore', but some answers said Jo's morals were corrupted by Helen's clients, queueing up. Again, Helen may feel that she 'needs' a drink, but she is not an alcoholic who has to drink a bottle of whisky for breakfast in order to function as some candidates commented.

(b) Candidates found many reasons to sympathise with the difficulties of Jo's existence, and the problem for those with a sound knowledge of the text, lay not in finding material, but in selecting and organising it. Some of the most successful answers structured their response by showing how Jo is treated, chronologically, by the other characters in the play. She is abused emotionally by Helen and verbally by Peter; Boy and Geof treat her better, but she is abandoned left alone and pregnant by the former, and the latter is chased away by Helen when Jo needed him the most. Candidates who could comment on each of these relationships with close textual support and with careful links to the task, were well rewarded. As often happens with questions where relevant material is spread through most of the text, some candidates lapse into narrative, recounting the events of the play for each character, so that focus on the task was not always sustained. The best answers engaged with the dramatic impact of events in Jo's life with many candidates able to

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empathise with Jo. There was a clear understanding of the deeper implications of the text with Jo trapped in a cycle of life not dissimilar to her mother.

A few responses were not altogether sympathetic towards Jo because she is not always pleasant. For example, to her mother, perhaps justifiably so, and to Geof with less good reason. Though the weight of evidence led most candidates to feel sorry for Jo, balanced views were acceptable as long as they were supported by reference to the text.

Less successful answers could not refer sufficiently closely to episodes in the text and this resulted in a generalised sense of Jo being neglected, isolated and lonely but without any evidence. Several candidates resorted to using the passage in **Question 1a**, which was self-penalising.

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

Question 2

(a) Whilst there were some good responses showing understanding of the satire and the deeper implications of the Resident's behaviour and language, many candidates struggled to understand the nuances of his character, or the critique of colonialism that he represents. All candidates were aware of the high status of the Resident; some felt the Resident was a very competent and admirable man while others found him uninformed, arrogant and racist.

The most successful responses recognised that Soyinka presents the Resident as an authoritative, insensitive, and culturally arrogant colonial figure and demonstrated a secure understanding of the tensions between British administrators and indigenous Yoruba characters, using this to support their interpretation. The best responses engaged closely with Soyinka's language, dialogue, and stage directions to explore how the Resident becomes a memorable presence at this moment in the drama. There were a range of ideas about the Resident's language. For example, in response to the line*, 'I think they used to have some rather colourful sashes'*, more successful responses were able to explore why this suggestion could be patronising and emblematic of the troubling attitude of the colonisers. Candidates who paid attention to the tone of his replies, his dismissiveness, and the cold formality of his language were able to comment insightfully on how Soyinka makes him both memorable and objectionable. The best answers explored the humour in Pilkings' sotto voce responses and the irony in his suggestion that the Prince be informed of the true nature of the 'riot'.

Less successful answers showed limited understanding of this encounter: calling the Prince the King, and not understanding the Resident mistaking his own men for the rioters or why their uniforms had bits missing and ignoring Pilkings' lack of respect for his superior or just narrating the conversation. Some misread his portrayal by taking him at face value, mistakenly viewing him as keen to learn about native customs. Several answers treated the text as prose, rather than drama, missing the tension on stage and interaction between characters. Some weak responses confused this text with *Things Fall Apart.*

(b) This was a more popular question and Iyaloja's role was well understood. Most recognised Iyaloja as a powerful, morally authoritative figure whose presence carries cultural and spiritual significance. The most successful responses explored Soyinka's use of language, stagecraft, and characterisation to show Iyaloja as a memorable, morally compelling figure. These candidates were generally able to cite examples of her status, her commitment to the traditions of her people, her relationship with Elesin and her importance in the ceremony. Better responses pointed out she was respected not only by the women, but also Elesin and Pilkings. Iyaloja's love of her culture, her understanding of Elesin's weaknesses and her leadership qualities were all cited as part of her fascination. Her intelligence in foreseeing trouble with Elesin's love of earthly pleasures being too much to die willingly, and her authority in warning him against this, were features of stronger response. These candidates could give specific textual support. Few candidates, however, could refer closely to the power of her language, except when chastising Elesin at the end of the play. Similarly, many referred to her use of proverbs but could not provide examples. Most answers quoted that she was '*the mother of the market-place'* but not all showed response to language by analysing that being a mother meant she cared for the women and looked after their interests, standing up for their interests against colonialists and police.

Less successful responses wrote about her in very generalised terms with little textual detail to support comments. They tended to describe the character superficially describing her as 'powerful'

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or 'wise' or summarised the plot, rather than analysing Soyinka's methods in portraying her. Weaker answered ignored 'fascinating' completely and wrote a few comments about her role but with many misreadings of the text. Some commented that she offered her daughter to marry Elesin and that later she tells Olunde to kill himself. As with **Question 2a**, some weak responses confused this text with *Things Fall Apart.*

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: *A Streetcar Named Desire*

Question 3

(a) This was a very popular text and question. There were some sensitive answers to the developing relationship between Mitch and Blanche. Most candidates recognised that the scene is pivotal for the evolving dynamic between Mitch and Blanche, showing increasing intimacy and emotional connection. Stronger answers explored Williams' use of dialogue, stage directions, and dramatic tension to show the growing bond, while weaker responses tended to summarise the action or describe character traits without detailed reference to *how* Williams conveys the relationship. The most successful responses examined the fragility of their connection and how it is based on Mitch and Blanche's shared grief and fear of loneliness rather than attraction and compatibility. There was general agreement about Mitch's regard for Blanche and his hope that the relationship would progress; candidates cited his nervousness and his hope to reassure his mother, as evidence. There was some insight into how Blanche tries to recruit Mitch into her battle with Stanley, then how she encourages intimacy with Mitch through her sympathy and soft words. High-achieving responses also noted how she lies about her situation and avoids Mitch's question about her age, recognising the bittersweet nature of these tender moments of genuine connection, being built on a foundation of deceit. Some discussed how Blanche's flirtatious yet nervous speech conveys both desire and insecurity, and how Mitch's tentative questions and careful responses show empathy and caution.

Less successful responses relied on narrative, retelling the passage or over-emphasised the context by giving Blanche's back story at some length, losing focus on the passage. Some weaker answers were often less aware of Blanche's intentions here, sometimes asserting that she is not as keen as Mitch for this liaison to develop. Others found it difficult to see Mitch's hints at getting closer to Blanche. These answers tended not to use the passage effectively, making assertions, but not supporting them by close reference to the text. Some answers went well beyond the extract, explaining for example, how Stanley ruins their relationship later in the play, and missed opportunities provided by the extract.

(b) This was not as well answered as **Question 3a** and seemed quite challenging for some candidates who wrote generally about Stanley and Stella's relationship, rather than his '*feelings for Stella'*. The most successful answers wrote a balanced argument, exploring the moments of passion and tenderness between Stanley and Stella and also exposing the often manipulative and abusive qualities, and the role that sex and desire play in their relationship. Candidates who could explore the contradictions and ambiguities in his feelings and the relationship, supported by apt reference and quotation, were well-rewarded. Better responses recognised the toxicity of this dynamic and questioned the abusive nature of Stanley's need to dominate but there were many who concluded that Stanley's love for Stella was heartfelt and sincere. Other candidates justified Stanley's behaviour in terms of Stella's acquiescence. They argued that Stella was generally happy, even 'thrilled' by his antics and that the relationship was fundamentally a happy and successful one. This interpretation is supported by some evidence, though candidates had to be careful not to focus too much on Stella, as the question asks specifically about Stanley.

Weaker responses drifted towards discussing Stanley, without linking this back to the question concerning his feelings for Stella. Some seemed to misunderstand Stanley as being a totally caring man who loved Stella, without seeing the underlying abusive relationship below it. Whilst some were able to identify Stanley's jealousy of Blanche and his fears of losing Stella to her, answers tended to be overly sympathetic, taking the view that, because Stanley was sorry for it, his use of violence towards Stella was excused by his subsequent distress. Disturbingly, a number of candidates also justified Stanley's rape of Blanche as he was a 'macho man', missing Stella, or that the sexual attraction between him and Blanche enabled them to arrive at this point whilst Stella was conveniently at the hospital.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE*: A Midsummer's Night Dream*

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Question 4

(a) This was a very popular text and question with many perceptive and insightful responses to this '*powerfully dramatic moment'*. There was much to explore here and many candidates demonstrated critical understanding of the passage and wider context within the play as the pivotal scene behind Lysander and Hermia's decision to flee Athens, thereby setting in motion the rest of the play.

The most successful answers were characterised by a sense of audience and engagement with the shock factor of the potential consequences of Hermia's 'choices' and the unfair dominance of males. There was close exploration of the passage and the portrayal of Lysander and Demetrius to enhance the unfairness; the intensity of Theseus's description of the life of a nun and Hermia's spirited and unconventional resistance. The best responses analysed the language of ownership, Egeus's rigidity as compared with Theseus's more measured and slightly less callous approach and also contrasted Demetrius's arrogance with Lysander's passionate and ironic contributions. There were some perceptive comments on Theseus giving Hermia 'time to pause' and an alternative to death. However, surprisingly few candidates understood '*the fruitless moon'* meaning that nuns do not bear children. Hermia is the key character here and the best answers focused on her boldness and determination, explaining why what she says requires courage as well as conviction. Many candidates wrote about Hermia's plight with evident empathy. More successful responses were aware of how Shakespeare constructed her character to evoke these feelings in the audience.

Some less successful responses lapsed into narrative, gave literal translations of the passage or avoided much discussion of the passage, instead choosing to give a narrative overview of the play as a whole. Some wrote too much about the Patriarchy, at the expense of looking at the passage and ignored the question and the power of the language altogether. They also seemed to miss the death penalty issue. Many commented on the harsh punishment for disobeying your father in Elizabethan times, missing the Ancient Greek setting.

(b) There were some successful responses that recognised the use of situational and dramatic irony and the extent to which the audience is in on the joke being played on both characters. The most successful responses examined the cruelty of this joke on Titania whilst noting that Bottom's punishment for his unwarranted hubris is humorously just. They commented on the incongruity of a fairy queen loving a weaver who has an ass's head. These responses explored Bottom's inflated self-importance, the absurdity of the transformation, and Titania's enchanted adoration. The contrast between mortal foolishness and magical enchantment was also a feature of successful answers.

In weaker responses, candidates could not go beyond just asserting it was funny, narrating what leads up to the encounter – why Oberon uses the love-potion and why Puck give Bottom an ass's head, but without focus on the actual encounter. Weaker responses also gave narrative overviews of the whole text with limited comment on Bottom and Titania, or discussed their interaction in a generalised way, failing to note even the most obvious ways Shakespeare creates comedy. A few responses were very confused over the encounter and whether Bottom has a donkey or ass's head; some stated it was funny due to their confusion over the word 'ass' with a more colloquial synonym of his name, Bottom.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE*: Antony and Cleopatra*

Question 5

(a) This question was the most popular on this text. Successful responses explored the characters' contrasting behaviour, tone and dialogue and commented effectively on Cleopatra's manipulation of Antony, and the way she dominates this passage and their relationship in general. There was understanding of the context, that Antony has been ignoring summons from Rome to return; that he now has to go to deal with the threat from Pompey, but that Cleopatra does not want him to go and tries to get him to stay.

There was critical understanding of their interactions and the mutual attraction, dependence, and tension revealed. Candidates commented on the way Cleopatra ignores Charmian's advice and is

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determined to approach Antony with fiery control. There was understanding of the way Cleopatra continually interrupts and dominates the exchanges with some candidates noting her use of hyperbole and superlatives in her emphatic and dramatic attack on Antony's character. Antony's contribution is straightforward: he is rational, affectionate and mostly patient, though with a hint of exasperation towards the end. Most candidates commented on some or all these aspects of his manner, many observing how difficult he finds it to say anything at all. Cleopatra is very different, and candidates who were able to work through her changing feelings with insight into the dramatic strategies she uses to manipulate Antony's responses, were able to meet the criteria for the higher levels. Some of the best answers recognised, and supported, a degree of uncertainty and insecurity in her, masked by her aggression and explored the theatricality in Cleopatra's 'performance'.

Weaker responses were hampered by misunderstanding of the context of the passage, thinking Antony was about to marry Fulvia or Octavia, not understanding that Antony knows Fulvia is dead but Cleopatra does not. At this point in the play, Cleopatra does not have that justification for her behaviour. Others were explanatory and narrative in approach with little textual reference or understanding of their relationship. Whilst some weaker responses made judgements about how this toxic, manipulative behaviour meant Cleopatra did not love Antony, there were some candidates who commented on the power of this love but this tended to be general with little focus on the passage. There were a number of misreadings including candidates mistaking Charmian for a random 'Chairman' referring to her as 'The Chairman' throughout the response.

(b) Whilst there were some successful responses which explored Enobarbus' role as advisor, confidant, loyal soldier and friend, there were many ineffective and largely narrative responses to this question. More successful responses understood that Enobarbus's feelings shift from admiration and loyalty to disillusionment and disappointment as Antony's behaviour changes. They effectively explored moments across the play which charted Enobarbus' wavering faith, eventual defection and subsequent death. Most knew the reasons for Enobarbus deserting Antony, his regret at deserting, and how his regard for Antony was restored. They considered Antony's honour in returning Enobarbus's treasures after he had deserted and the effect this selfless act had on Enobarbus, revealing his final shame and remorse. A few of the strongest responses considered Enobarbus's description of Cleopatra as a way of mitigating Antony's love for her, and the way he ignores his duty for her. The best responses analysed Shakespeare's use of language, imagery and dramatic structure, exploring Enobarbus's changing feelings and perspective, revealed through soliloquy-like reflections or asides, giving insight into his internal conflict. However, there was very little specific textual reference or quotations to support many responses.

Weaker responses focused on summarising Antony's actions, the plot or described their relationship without focusing on Enobarbus's feelings or how Shakespeare conveys them. Some did not know the text in enough detail to select relevant parts to consider and erroneously thought that he killed himself.

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LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 0475/33
Drama (Open Text)

Key messages

- The most successful responses avoided introductions which consisted of plot summaries, lengthy discussions of historical context or of the writer's life. Effective conclusions were more than a reiteration of points.
- Maintaining focus on the key terms of the question is essential in successful responses.
- Textual references and brief, precise quotations which were selected from throughout the text and analysed fully were the best method of supporting points. Line numbers in the place of quotations should not be used.
- If literary terms are identified, their intended effect on the audience should also be considered if the response is to progress.
- Brief contextualisation of the passage is important in passage-based responses, and detailed focus on textual references from throughout the passage and close exploration of the language was a feature of successful passage-based responses.
- In successful discursive responses the question remained in focus and precise textual references were selected from throughout the text.
- The most successful responses engaged with the text as drama and with the impact of the play on stage.

General comments

Many candidates demonstrated personal engagement with and enjoyment of the set texts and an awareness of the texts as drama was often evident. This meant that candidates were able to discuss the dramatic impact of the characterisation, stagecraft and language, resulting in a sensitive and perceptive approach.

There were two new texts this year*, A Taste of Honey* and *Antony and Cleopatra.* Centres are reminded that *Death and the King's Horseman* will be replaced as a set text in 2026, by Pearl Cleage's *Blues for an Alabama Sky.*

Candidates are allocated 45 minutes per essay and to produce a successful response. They should therefore immediately establish focus on the key terms of the question such as 'vividly', 'powerfully', 'striking' or 'memorable', ensuring that this focus is maintained throughout the essay. Making a brief plan before starting to write helps candidates to select relevant material from the text and encourages them to keep the question in mind. Annotation of the passage is also advisable as part of planning. Inclusion of lengthy introductory comments about the historical context of the play, a detailed plot summary or a list of themes to be covered are not productive within the limited exam time. Similarly, listing literary features as a way in which a passage was, for example, 'powerful' or 'memorable', is not a productive way to begin a response.

Successful responses understood that the texts are meant to be performed onstage and they engaged with the visual and aural impact of the play upon the audience, demonstrating this by referring to the 'audience', rather than 'reader', and to the 'play', rather than 'book'. Despite this, outlining recent stage productions of the play in detail or considering how an actor should deliver their lines is not a valuable use of exam time, and comments should be firmly rooted in the text. Strong responses showed an awareness that characters were constructs, created by the writer, and not real people and were able to outline their own, or propose other audience members' responses. The strongest responses 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, is unproductive. Less successful responses gravitated towards punctuation rather than the central ideas or accompanying language. Whilst relevant to the organisation of dialogue, punctuation must be considered in context, and the effect explored, otherwise the comment is meaningless.

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A successful passage-based response will often begin by briefly contextualising the passage within the wider play and by briefly referencing the question. The response should consider the key words in the question, the events of the passage and an exploration of the writer's methods in conveying his or her intentions to the audience. Brief well-selected references which are well focused, support a point and are preferably embedded in the writing, should be analysed fully but candidates should avoid over-analysis, as this often results in a response which is narrow in range and has limited coverage of the passage. Candidates are often able to correctly identify literary techniques such as simile, dramatic irony and foreshadowing, but the intended effect of these techniques should be analysed rather than simply asserting that they are present in the text.

In effective discursive responses, a sentence or two, referencing the key terms of the question, and giving a brief overview, is a helpful introduction, before going on to develop the points in the main body of the essay. Often, introductions featured valid ideas which were then not covered later. In successful responses a range of material was selected from the text as a whole and brief, well-selected references were used to support ideas, which is a key discriminator as indicated in the Level Descriptors. It is advisable for candidates to memorise brief quotations to be better prepared to analyse the writer's effects, and responses which lack analysis of these effects will not progress. Line numbers should not be used in the place of direct quotation from the passage as this limits opportunities for analysis of the ways in which writers achieve effects. As in passage-based responses, a detailed exploration of how the writer achieves his or her effects is an essential part of a well-developed discursive response.

Although handwriting is not assessed in this paper, it was observed that overall, the standard had deteriorated and at times obscured meaning. Candidates should attempt to write legibly and to avoid numerous crossings out to make sure that the response is as clear as possible.

Comments on specific questions

SHELAGH DELANEY: *A Taste of Honey*

Question 1

(a) Successful responses to this question often identified the happy and relaxed mood created by the stage directions of the fairground and balloons and commented on the use of light and darkness in the passage to illustrate Jo's wish to hide the reality of the dismal flat from her friend, preferring the '*romantic half-light*'.

The contrast of the relaxed and fun nature of Jo's relationship with Geof and her contentedness here, with her strained and unpleasant relationship with Helen was often identified, with comments on how Jo '*loved*' the fair, a positive word which is not normally associated with her. The naturalistic language used between the friends such as '*Do not be daft*' was also commented on. This level of response identified how Geof cares for Jo in a practical way during her pregnancy by making food and drink for her, and also how he makes her feel liked and safe. They understood that Geof is a part of Jo's joy and that these positive feelings are all in opposition to how Helen usually makes Jo feel.

Coverage of the passage was often thin in less successful responses which did not contextualise the passage with the understanding that Jo is now pregnant or the understanding that she is working hard to keep the flat. Candidates often found it difficult to identify the friendly relationship Jo enjoys with Geof, mistaking the banter between the two as Jo being aggressive and unsympathetic towards Geof. Some responses saw the opportunity to address the negative attitude towards homosexuality in the past, thus losing focus on the question.

(b) Very few responses were seen. A few points were identified about Peter's dislike of Jo and his womanising, but there was little in depth understanding of his character.

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

Question 2

(a) Successful responses focused on the staging of this moment, with the drumming in the background creating an ever-building source of tension and foreboding, particularly as its meaning is not understood, even by Joseph. Pilkings was seen by many as a thoroughly unlikeable character, rigid in his beliefs and someone who cannot comprehend any sort of validity in others' beliefs, thus foreshadowing later events in the play. His abrupt orders were shown to build the tension, for example, '*Oh, get back to the kitchen!*' along with his religious insults to Joseph, '*holy water nonsense'*. The clash between him and his staff was understood to show his stress and tension in this moment, with the confusion between him and Joseph in this moment adding to the pressure to discover the reason for the drumming. Some responses focused on Pilkings' impatience with Joseph owing to his selfish desire to ensure the party was not disturbed regardless of what the drumming symbolised. Candidates also understood that there is conflict between Jane and Pilkings which demonstrates the creation of tension in this moment. This is shown in their language: '*you're being ridiculous'*, '*nonsense*', *'blustering'*. Successful responses understood that Pilkings is under pressure to decide what to do about the report of Elesin's suicide, and that this causes tension as his main priority is to go to the ball which the prince will be attending.

Less successful responses showed limited engagement with the passage and tended to rely on narrative. These responses did not progress beyond commenting about Simon insulting Joseph and did not consider Jane's contribution to the passage and the context.

(b) There was some understanding of the relationship between Iyaloja and Elesin and how it changes, with Iyaloja's respect for Elesin at the beginning of the play turning to anger and contempt when he fails to commit ritual suicide as required in the Yoruba culture. Similarly, the change in atmosphere from the light-hearted, friendly atmosphere at the start changes upon an ominous warning of failure from Iyaloja. Iyaloja's role in guiding and assisting Elesin in the death ritual was understood, with many candidates being able to support their ideas with detailed references to the text.

Weaker responses lacked detailed textual support and development and some candidates, having shown a good understanding of the relationship at the beginning of the play, failed to fully address Iyaloja's anger and outrage towards Elesin when he fails to complete the ritual at the end of the play.

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: *A Streetcar Named Desire*

Question 3

(a) This was a very popular choice of text and question. The most successful responses contextualised the passage as following on from Blanche's failed birthday supper and from Stanley's revelations to Mitch about Blanche's past. They understood that Blanche feels that Mitch is her only hope of securing a future and that as a result there is a sense of desperation here. Mitch has come to accuse Blanche of lying but she is hoping to repair their relationship. Therefore, the seeds of conflict are already in place and it is clear that the previously amiable Mitch now holds more power in the relationship due to Stanley's influence. Many responses picked up on Blanche's reliance on alcohol and her pretence of not knowing where the bottle of liquor is, and there was much comment on the '*wild-cat'* image used by Mitch about Blanche's consumption of alcohol. Candidates understood how she is trying to maintain her image of purity and giving people what she thinks they want-an idealised version of herself rather than the reality. Candidates understood the foreshadowing of this; that her refusal to deal with reality leads to her breakdown.

Conflict in Mitch's growing anger towards Blanche was identified, such as his words '*I've never had a real good look at you'* and how he '*grunts*' and looks at her '*contemptuously'*. The contrast between this approach and his previous polite and considerate character and adoration of her was explored and candidates often referenced the auditory imagery in relation to Mitch grunting, further linking this to his increasingly animalistic attitude towards her. This change in his character was explored by many strong responses, and it was noted that his loyalties and attitudes have become more aligned with Stanley's aggressive, confrontational character. The light and dark imagery was explored in most responses, with the understanding of Blanche's fear of being seen in bright light, so that she can avoid the harsh reality of her life for a little longer, maintaining her illusion of beauty, youth and innocence. The symbolism of Mitch tearing the paper lantern and exposing

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Blanche's lies was discussed, along with the irony that it was he who originally put up the lantern at Blanche's request. Blanche's remark, *'I do not want realism'*, and her wish for '*magic'* rather than truth was perceptively identified as a rare example of Blanche being honest with Mitch, and with herself.

Less successful responses did not show understanding of the context of the passage and so were not able to explore the full implications of Blanche and Mitch's conversation. Despite this, these responses were able to identify the symbolism of the light and paper lantern but often showed limited coverage of the passage and drifted into narrative, with little direct textual support. Many responses commented on the contrast between Mitch's short, blunt utterances with Blanche's rambling speech, but supporting textual examples were rarely provided. Responses which centred mainly on Blanche were often self-limiting.

(b) The vast majority of candidates who responded to this question agreed with the statement that Stella is too good for Stanley owing to his dominant nature and aggressive behaviour towards her. Successful responses focused on Stella and Blanche's upbringing and the higher social status that Stella holds in comparison with Stanley, who was born to an immigrant Polish family and classes himself as '*common as dirt'*, while at the same time demanding to be seen as the '*King around here'*. The couple's morals and personalities were discussed, with Stella's kindness and consideration for others being presented as a reason why she is too good for Stanley, in contrast to his rude and domineering manner. The animal imagery that is used by the two women about Stanley was highlighted as another reason why Stella could be classed as superior to him, particularly Blanche's criticisms of him, calling him an '*animal*', and '*ape-like'*. Some responses balanced these observations with criticism of Stella, believing that in not challenging Stanley's behaviour, staying with him after he is violent towards her and not acknowledging that she believes Blanche's claim that Stanley raped her, she is enabling his behaviour and lowering herself to his level. It was understood that a reason for this is that Stella's sexual desires are stronger than her response to Stanley's abuse but that the intense desire that binds the couple co-exists with violence.

Stella's decision to choose Stanley over Blanche at the end of the play was given by some candidates as a reason to disagree with the statement 'Stella is too good for Stanley', and that Stella lowers herself to Stanley's level by making this choice. Insightful responses discussed the idea of Stella being just as pragmatic and realistic as her husband. In choosing Stanley over Blanche, some responses argued that she took the most optimal choice in terms of her own stability, therefore making her morally questionable. Likewise, there were comments on Stella matching Stanley's primal instincts and desires whilst ignoring the toxicity of their relationship and therefore reaching the conclusion that she was not 'too good for Stanley'.

There was also recognition that at the end of the play Stanley's limitations as a husband are clear and that all he can offer Stella is physical comfort.

Less successful responses tended to drift into lengthy discussion of 1950s America and male domination of society. They often discussed Blanche in detail, losing sight of Stella and lacked consideration of Stella and Stanley's backgrounds and their differing social classes. These responses made superficial comments about the relationship, understanding the desire at the heart of it, but lacking support or development. However, the majority of candidates recognised the brutality of Stanley and could support their views to some extent.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

Question 4

(a) Successful responses set the passage in context, understanding that it follows on from the complications in the plot created by Puck's interference. They understood Puck's delight in the deception of the two Athenian men in this passage: that he mimics their voices and intends to tire them out so that they will sleep in order for him to remove the effects of the love potion from Lysander allowing him to wake and be in love with Hermia again. There was some worthwhile comment on the drama created by Puck and his mischief within the passage with many candidates mentioning his imitation of Demetrius and the ensuing action. They referenced the dramatic irony of this moment, with the audience having an overview of the tangled situation but with the two men being oblivious.

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There was some analysis of the language used by Puck and Oberon at the start of the passage, with the contrasting images of Puck's '*black-brow'd night*', '*Damned spirits'* and '*wormy beds'* and Oberon's '*fair blessed beams'* and '*yellow gold'*. This was interpreted as illustrating Puck's mischief and Oberon's welcoming of the dawn and his wish to create order. There was also some worthwhile comment on Puck's chanting and his pleasure in casting a spell. Puck's insults used to Demetrius and Lysander were commented on, such as '*villain'*, '*coward*' and *'thou child*'. And it was understood that he is challenging the men's honour. The effect of the setting of the passage in the forest before dawn was discussed, with focus on the dramatic impact of lines such as '*night's swift dragons'* and '*Aurora's harbinger'.*

Weaker responses lacked understanding of the passage's context with many thinking that Oberon is about to play the trick on Titania; some thought Puck had to remove the potion from her eyes. These less successful responses did not cover the passage thoroughly, often with little or no comment on the opening dialogue between Puck and Oberon, moving straight onto the later section of the passage involving Puck's teasing of Demetrius and Lysander but with little progression beyond identifying some of the insults they use. Some responses understood the need for haste in rectifying the confusion between the Lovers, and overall, the majority of candidates understood the way that Puck is mimicking the men and tormenting them, even if comments were not fully supported or developed. There was some misunderstanding of Puck's tone, thinking that he is trying to calm and soothe the men with his words.

(b) Successful responses commented on the Mechanicals as individuals, their roles in the play and their actual performances. There was response to their language and their comedic value to the play, with particular focus on Bottom as an important comic figure. Candidates understood that the Mechanicals are simple men when compared with the duke but that they are all skilled in their own fields. They had knowledge of the play which is to be performed at the wedding of Theseus and Hippolyta and there was some focus on the rehearsals. They understood the comic relief that the Mechanicals add to the play with their unintentional humour, slapstick and physical comedy and that although they are well-meaning and enthusiastic, their acting skills leave a lot to be desired. Most of the focus in responses was on Bottom, commenting on his over-confidence in wanting to play all the roles, his misunderstandings and mispronunciations and the transformation with the ass's head. There was understanding that the Mechanicals are seen as stupid by Puck, but that Theseus values their loyalty and decency. The endearing nature and sincerity of the mechanicals was noted by many candidates and how this factor contributed to making them 'striking' characters within the play.

Some less successful responses did not progress beyond the episode of Bottom's transformation with an ass's head, and the other Mechanicals were almost ignored. Some responses misunderstood the term 'Mechanicals' and focused on the mechanics of the play in general with some general comments on language and structure. Some candidates confused the Mechanicals with the fairies, and classed Puck as a Mechanical. Understanding of the group of characters was often insecure, with thin outlines of the Mechanicals' role in the play. These responses often identified the comic role of the Mechanicals in the play but lacked textual support. They often relied heavily on narrative and there was little focus on the episode between Bottom and Titania.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Antony and Cleopatra*

Question 5

(a) The passage gave candidates the chance to engage with a powerful and emotional moment as Antony dies. Successful responses contextualised this moment as following on from Cleopatra hiding in her monument and pretending to commit suicide after deserting Antony's fleet and fearing his consequent anger. Antony has fatally wounded himself in a suicide attempt and asks to be taken to her. Whilst some responses merely described the scene others demonstrated their knowledge in terms of it being a turning point in the play with Antony's death setting the path for Cleopatra's suicide, amplifying the power of the scene. Candidates recognised that Antony considers himself '*The greatest prince of the world'* and wishes to be remembered as honourable. They referenced his use of *'Egypt'* in place of Cleopatra's name, but few developed this idea which acknowledges her status.

Less successful responses struggled to engage with the language of the passage and understanding was not secure. They did not set the passage in context and often mistakenly thought that Antony is calling himself a coward, when in fact he is remembering his great deeds

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and wishing to be remembered as a '*prince*'. They did not progress beyond identifying that Antony dies, with little coverage or understanding of Cleopatra's words following his death.

(b) The majority of responses focused on Caesar and Enobarbus. Successful responses were able to focus on Caesar's sense of honour and duty to Rome, and his harsh language and judgement of Antony in '*He hath given his empire/Up to a whore'*. They commented on his sense of honour and respect for Antony and Cleopatra when they die, with some speculating on how genuine this sorrow is and to what extent it is politically performative rather than genuine grief. Strong responses were able to consider not only Caesar's sense of honour but also his political manoeuvring and manipulation of people. There were some insightful comments on Enobarbus' sense of honour, his personal integrity, loyalty and sense of shame. This level of response engaged successfully with his devoted service to Antony, which makes his own dishonourable desertion unbearable to him, compounded when Antony nobly sends him his treasure. His lines such as '*I will go seek/Some ditch wherein to die'* and '*I am alone the villain of the earth*.' were explored and understood to show his dramatic distress. Candidates who chose to write about Pompey identified his moral integrity, with most noting his honourable decision not to attack the triumvirs while they sleep. Strong responses discussed how he fights for Rome and his reputation and has legitimate grievances. However, even strong responses had a tendency to lose focus on the named characters and drift into discussion of Antony. These responses, although showing an overall understanding of the importance of honour to Caesar often lacked discussion of his hypocritical betrayal of Lepidus and ruthless attack on Pompey.

Less successful responses were uneven, with the majority of the discussion based on only one character, and only a few comments on the second; or with only one character being discussed. Many candidates struggled to remain focused on the named characters and instead drifted into often detailed discussion of Antony or of the theme of honour in general. Most could identify Caesar's honour as a Roman, Pompey's honour in not assassinating the visitors to his ship, and Enobarbus's honour and loyalty to Antony but they did not develop these ideas. Discussion of Caesar's honour was often directed solely towards Antony and how Caesar judges his dishonourable behaviour when he ignores his duty to Rome due to his love for Cleopatra. Responses were able to identify Caesar's outward stance for what is honourable and dutiful, but few focused on the deeds which reflect his lack of honour, such as betraying Lepidus and attacking Pompey. Some responses incorrectly stated that Caesar is cold and emotionless, expressing no emotion when Antony and Cleopatra die.

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LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 0475/41
Unseen

Key messages

- Candidates should pay more attention to the specific techniques of prose analysis in preparing for this paper.
- Misunderstandings of surface meaning are rare, but candidates sometimes struggle with figurative meaning or appreciation of the writer's purpose.
- Candidates could be more careful to recognise a range of possible meanings and should look at what a text suggests rather than states directly.
- Analysis of the writer's craft and methods is the most effective way to evaluate the overall effect of a text.
- Personal response is interpretation grounded in the text, with especial attention to how the text ends.

General comments

This is a well-established and consistent optional component in the IGCSE Literature in English qualification and candidates are usually well-prepared, using the bullet points effectively to guide their responses to the stem question. The Cambridge School Support Hub provides a continually updated archive of past papers for this component. The past papers and examiner reports to teachers are a valuable resource, for candidate practice and teacher feedback, so that learners are aware of the reading skills practised in this paper and the kind of interpretation examiners look to reward.

All the Assessment Objectives in the syllabus are tested in this paper, making it an effective synoptic assessment of the skills candidates have developed throughout the course. However, practice with past poetry and prose questions instructs candidates in the slightly different reading skills and technical features of each genre, and can develop response to a wide range of different text types. The poems and extracts used will be challenging, and ask candidates to explore beyond surface meaning, investigate ambiguities and make their own personal response to the writing. They are helped by the guidance in the rubric, which clarifies the situation and context of the extract, the glossing of confusing or unusual vocabulary and the bullet points. These aim to focus candidates' responses on key features of the writing and questions of interpretation or personal response implicit in the stem question. The stem question itself is always focused on the writing and the writer's choices, and how these create particular effects on the reader. Candidates should pay close attention to the words in the stem question that indicate the nature of the personal response, such as striking, disturbing, inviting, intriguing, vividly, powerfully etc, as these provide an indication of the tone and mood created by the language of the text.

Candidates should be prepared to respond to either poetry or prose: in this session, poetry questions remain more popular although some weaker candidates choose the prose in order to write a straightforward response to the surface narrative. However, good responses to prose require just as much attention to the writer's choices of language and effects as a response to poetry, and critical awareness of some of the particular tools for analysis of narrative, such as the choice of point of view or narrative voice, and the use of dialogue and description to make an impact on the reader.

AO1 Knowledge supported by textual reference

In the unseen paper, AO1 represents knowledge of the surface narrative of a poem or prose passage, supported by appropriate textual reference. Although some texts in this session were short, they were complex, and good use of the 20 minutes of preparation time was essential to avoid misunderstandings. Candidates should identify key turning points and changes of tone or structure in poems, and changes of focus or viewpoint or narrative developments in the prose. Some misunderstandings arise when candidates do not read beyond the line ending of a line of verse, or pay too little attention to who is speaking in

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passages of dialogue. Often the focus in reading the prose is more on what is happening than whose thoughts and feelings are being described, which can lead to an over-literal interpretation. Some candidates are more keen to show their knowledge of poetic form or literary terms, rather than think about the relationship of the text's rhetoric and language features to what is said. First paragraphs are much more impressive when they convey an accurate overview of what the poem or passage describes than when they simply provide a list of features. Quotation is a good way to show close engagement with how the writer makes meaning in a text, but lengthy quotations and paraphrase only show surface understanding. For higher marks, deeper understanding, analysis of effects and a personal response to individual and overall aspects of tone and mood are all crucial.

AO2 Understanding at a deeper level

A deep level of understanding is the key to higher marks, looking beyond the surface meaning of the text and exploring why the writer wrote it and what impact it is intended to make on the reader. This level of understanding cannot be reached on a first reading, which is why a re-reading of the text and a careful mark-up of a plan is essential before beginning to write. Candidates should look at the text in the light of how it ends, and chart its development through different stages, with attention to the structure of the whole text as well as the deeper meaning of individual images or phrases. The bullet points often give candidates some assistance, by drawing attention to particular images or structural contrasts. Syntax and stanza structure in poetry or paragraphing in prose can help to identify key developments, so there is a close link between AO2 and AO3. Patterns of imagery, or developments in characterisation as well as narrative events, can be indications of a deeper meaning to the text than the story it appears to be telling. This is especially true of poetry, of course, which is a form based on strong figurative uses of language encouraging reader interpretation of the connection between the image and the subject matter. Stronger responses are tentative when interpretation is not straightforward, using phrases like 'this suggests that' or 'this could be seen as 'or 'this might be interpreted as'.

AO3 Language, structure and form

Attention to details of the writer's craft is crucial to success in this paper, and when preparing their responses the stronger candidates mark up the poem or prose passage, highlighting key images or phrasing and identifying their relationship to the overall structure of the text. Imagery in the form of metaphors and similes is often prominent in prose as well as poetry; however, only poems contain enjambment and caesura. Although candidates are right to look at the rhythm and pattern of phrases and sentences in prose, this is very different from exploring the effects of sound and metre in poetry. In prose, the choice of narrative voice, characterisation through dialogue, creation of tension, suspense and climax replace the lyrical or dramatic viewpoint of the poem and its development through stanza form. In both, asking why the writer made those choices of language and structure helps the candidate to deepen their overall understanding of the whole poem and shape an informed personal response. The more candidates write about the effect of the literary features of the text, the more they shape an interpretation of the overall impression the text makes on the reader.

AO4 Personal response and interpretation

This Assessment Objective applies to the whole response, which should take the form of an interpretation of the text and its impact on the candidate, as a reader. The stem question encourages them to explain the impact and mood of the text as a whole, supported by analysis of detail. Personal response is not merely subjective, or the expression of a personal opinion about the subject matter of the text; it is a developed critical response to the style and structure of the writing. Weaker responses sometimes get distracted by the situation described, especially in a prose text, or show insufficient reflection on how the text ends. Usually, the final lines or sentences are especially helpful in forming an overall interpretation. Answers need to be sufficiently well-planned and selective to ensure that comments on the closing part of a text are as thoughtful as those on its opening. Good conclusions to arguments are a development of ideas and observations throughout the essay rather than a repetition of points made earlier, so the final paragraph of an unseen answer should bring together knowledge, understanding and the effects of language and structure. A response which shows critical understanding has awareness of why the writer wrote the text, and its intended effect on the reader.

In practice for this paper, candidates should develop a realistic sense of how much they can write in the time allowed, and past papers are invaluable for this. Practice in writing effective opening paragraphs and strong conclusions with clear overall interpretations is also very valuable, and easy to organise in class time. Peer assessment of stronger and weaker opening and closing paragraphs can help learners to see what is most effective in exam conditions, as well as develop their understanding of the texts themselves.

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Comments on specific questions

Question 1

Where the Sidewalk Ends by Shel Silverstein attracted many secure and insightful responses.

The focus of the question was, as always in this paper, on the poet's methods. In relation to *Where the Sidewalk Ends*, the question aimed to elicit candidates' interpretation of how the poet makes the imaginary space between the road and the pavement an inviting 'place' for the reader. Many candidates, irrespective of whether they fully appreciated the poet's intended meaning, revealed some sensitivity to the poet's use of language. Fewer candidates made purposeful comments on the poem's structure or rhythm.

The relative brevity of the poem afforded many candidates the opportunity to write about each stanza in some detail and numerous excellent exegeses of the poet's aims, methods and effects were seen. Most candidates were able to identify the place 'where the sidewalk ends' as a beautiful, if somewhat bizarre location. Some candidates began to pursue the idea of 'the place' being the site of imagination or a 'dream world'; others, construed it as 'heaven', with the 'real' world being depicted as a form of 'hell'.

The first stanza proved the most accessible to all candidates. Most candidates recognised the unusual characteristics of the imagined place, as conveyed by the 'soft and white' nature of the grass that 'grows' there, the `crimson bright' and fiercely burning 'sun', the existence of a 'moon-bird' and the refreshing 'peppermint wind'. Many appeared to enjoy the fantastical elements and perceived them as being both 'attractive' and 'inviting'. Some candidates appeared less surprised by the unusual 'flora and fauna' to be found 'where the sidewalk ends' and many failed to say anything at all about the 'moon-bird', except that it was able to 'rest from his flight'. 'Peppermint' was sometimes understood as a flavour, sometimes as a scent, generally deemed to be 'refreshing' and an antidote to the 'burning sun', but just as likely to be ignored as the exotic 'moon-bird' so frequently was.

There were some interesting comments on the opening lines, speculating on where exactly the sidewalk ends. A few candidates commented on the impossibility of a place existing in the tiny gap between the sidewalk and street, in their attempt to rationalise their interpretation that the poet might have been suggesting the finest of lines between 'reality' and 'dream' or 'imagination' and sometimes, between 'life' and 'afterlife'. In terms of their appreciation of the poet's use of language, numerous candidates picked up the alliteration of 'grass grows'; fewer made comment on the effect created. Some candidates noted the rhyming within the first stanza; others identified a semantic field of nature.

In many responses, candidates identified the anaphora of 'and there' and its purpose in building up the image of the multiple features of 'the place'. The more confident candidates equated this to a child, listing things they enjoy, linking this to poet's references to children as champions of the imagination. Some candidates noted the incidence of monosyllabic vocabulary, specifically mentioning the verbs, 'ends', 'grows', 'burns', 'rests' which they identified as being 'simple' or 'childlike' and therefore linking with the idea that 'children they mark' and 'children they know' – adding another two examples of monosyllabic verbs to the tally of 'simplistic'(sic) language. Some candidates also took notice of a subtle way in which the poet differentiates between the contrasting 'places' explored in the poem; observing that the imagined place is referred to, initially, as 'a place', and, later, as 'the place', whereas the 'realistic' place is identified as 'this place', rooting it in the present, and representing 'our' shared reality. This observation served candidates well, in response to each of the bullet point 'prompts'.

While most candidates commented quite well on the first stanza, the second stanza proved to be more of a challenge. While many candidates described the second stanza as 'realistic' and almost all acknowledged that the poet intended to create a stark contrast between 'this place' and the 'other' place, some candidates remarked on some fairly surreal elements, also present, in stanza two. While the majority of candidates noted that the second stanza presents an urban, 'polluted' place, others identified a more sinister yet still far from realistic setting. In 'this place', candidates suggested that both the smoke and the street take on somewhat sinister human characteristics. Citing 'the smoke blows black', the 'dark street winds and bends', some candidates envisaged a figure of doom, belching out smoke as he gropes along the street in the dark. While few candidates understood the meaning of 'pits', most inferred connotations of both darkness and danger of some sort. The 'asphalt flowers' were seen either as a testament to nature's ability to thrive in the unlikeliest of conditions or seen as a consequence of man's thoughtless destruction of the planet. Either way, candidates found a way to comment on the evils of industrialisation. In better answers, candidates compared the growth of soft white grass from Stanza one with the growth of 'asphalt flowers' in Stanza two.

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Candidates generally did well when discussing the ways in which the poet persuades the reader to join his walk, noting the repetition of 'we'll walk with a walk'. Many candidates commented on the musicality that this repetition lends to the poem. Some compared this section to the rhythm of nursery rhymes or of children singing. The choice of the inclusive word, 'we'll' was also mentioned in a majority of responses and most noted how the poet uses this to lull the reader into agreeing to join the speaker's planned excursion. In more than one answer, candidates alluded to the Pied Piper. The 'chalk-white arrows' were variously interpreted, sometimes literally, sometimes, more metaphorically.

Some candidates suggested that the speaker assuages the reluctant reader's 'fear of the unknown' by inviting them to join a walk that is so clearly signposted. Others suggested that the arrows will lead the walkers, in a 'measured and slow' way towards their final destination. The destination was variously interpreted as a haven of comfort and light, or, simply, a terminus.

Question 2

The prose extract was taken from *Home Fire* by Kamila Shamsie. A large proportion of candidates chose the prose option in this series. Most candidates were unanimous in agreeing with the premise of the question that the extract is 'intriguing'. However, not all candidates maintained focus on exploring the ways in which the writer creates that sense of intrigue. The question asked about the writer's methods for creating intrigue; the bullet pointed guidelines referred to tension. Candidates frequently focused upon the creation of tension but did not refer at all to the writer's creation of intrigue, perhaps not appreciating that these are two linked, but not identical, literary effects.

Most candidates understood that, although the extract is written from a third-person perspective, the author also accesses, and shares Isma's 'inner thoughts' with the reader. Other candidates did not articulate their understanding of this technique, or they did not understand the writer's perspective and consequently, some candidates appeared to be muddled about the unfolding action and Isma's thoughts about her ordeal. Almost all candidates identified 'discrimination' or 'prejudice' as underlying themes in the piece, and most candidates used the question bullet points to guide their responses.

In stronger answers, candidates identified the opening statement 'Isma was going to miss her flight' as immediately introducing intrigue and tension for the reader. In good answers, candidates mentioned Isma's fear of missing the flight, her anxiety about the expected interrogation, and having to forfeit the cost of the flight if she missed boarding the plane on time. These candidates took the time to explore what Isma was finding so 'humiliating' about her experience of having her luggage searched, and how she felt watching the officer rifling through her things, inspecting the quality of her belongings and, effectively, judging Isma, based on her possessions. While some candidates merely catalogued the items that Isma had consciously excluded from her luggage - her Quran, family pictures and academic books - in stronger responses, candidates showed their understanding that these items together represented Isma's identity. Stronger answers also included comment on the fact that Isma was actively attempting to conceal this identity, and they questioned Isma's motives. The majority of candidates saw Isma as an entirely innocent victim of racial/religious discrimination and consequently viewed the 'British authorities' at the airport as both racist and provocative. Occasionally, candidates expressed the possibility that Isma might have something to hide, and they based their theory on Isma's expectation of being searched and the preventative measures that she took to evade suspicion. These candidates deduced from the fact that Isma had previously 'encountered' the tactics of 'security personnel' for making a 'suspect' appear to sound 'more guilty', that Isma was no stranger to the interest of 'officials' and concluded that these suspicions may be well-founded. By keeping an open mind, these candidates were often more sensitive to the nuances of the writing than those who immediately saw Isma as a victim of prejudice.

When considering the exchange between the woman officer and Isma, most candidates focused on the officer's patronising assumption about Isma's jacket, quoting, "'This isn't yours,' she said, and Isma was sure she didn't mean *because it's at least a size too large* but rather *it's too nice for someone like you."* Only careful readers noted the fact that the writer is quoting the officer in the phrase, 'This isn't yours' but that the italicised phrase '*it's too nice for someone like you'* replicated Isma's interpretation of what the officer had said. Many candidates understood the hostility implicit in the woman officer's manner of questioning Isma but often appeared unable to identify how the writer conveyed it. Other candidates focused on the tone of the woman officer, conveyed partly through the punctuation of her speech, making her questions or comments about Isma sound sarcastic or disbelieving. They noted her apparent lack of compassion in response to Isma's statement about having to raise her orphaned siblings and they suggested that the woman's apparent lack of basic 'humanity' increased the tension for Isma, while intriguing the reader. In astute responses, candidates noted that Isma had `encountered this situation before', suggesting a form of systematic discrimination. Very few candidates inferred, that Isma may have experienced previous interrogations

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because she was actually a ‘security risk’ or a ‘person of interest’ to the authorities, because of her previous actions or associations.

A few candidates referred to Isma’s dilemma about whether, in the absence of the woman officer, she should re-arrange the contents of her re-packed suitcase into a ‘haphazard pile’. These candidates concluded that Isma’s fear that her action might ‘make things even worse’, did not suggest complete ‘innocence’ and that her action of unzipping the suitcase, ‘so its contents were visible’ was a clear indication that Isma has something to hide. In the exchange between the man and Isma, most candidates focused on the man’s repetition of the question about British identity. They also alluded to the fact that by carrying Isma’s `passport, laptop and phone’ the man metaphorically held Isma’s personal identity and her destiny ‘in his hands.’ Many candidates acknowledged the symbolism of the man placing the voice recorder `between them’ representing a physical barrier between interrogator and interrogatee.

Most candidates used the bullet points to structure their responses; others found their own ‘way in’ to the passage, while still including attention to the bullet points. For example, some tracked the growing tension and intrigue through the writer’s use of time in the extract beginning with the prediction ‘Isma was going to miss her flight’, then references to ‘three hours’, to Isma’s ‘hours of waiting’, ‘told Isma to wait’, ‘spent the time’ and ‘that had been a while ago’ and ‘the plane would be boarding now’. The most successful candidates never lost sight of the question: ‘How does the writer make this an intriguing opening to her novel?’ and their attempt to identify the methods used to intrigue the reader was consistently supported with short, apt, pithy quotation.

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LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 0475/42
Unseen

Key messages

- Candidates should pay more attention to the specific techniques of prose analysis in preparing for this paper.
- Misunderstandings of surface meaning are rare, but candidates sometimes struggle with figurative meaning or appreciation of the writer's purpose.
- Candidates could be more careful to recognise a range of possible meanings and should look at what a text suggests rather than states directly.
- Analysis of the writer's craft and methods is the most effective way to evaluate the overall effect of a text.
- Personal response is interpretation grounded in the text, with especial attention to how the text ends.

General comments

This is a well-established and consistent optional component in the IGCSE Literature in English qualification and candidates are usually well-prepared, using the bullet points effectively to guide their responses to the stem question. The Cambridge school support hub provides a continually updated archive of past papers for this component. The past papers and Examiner reports to teachers are a valuable resource for candidate practice and teacher feedback, ensuring that learners are aware of the reading skills practised in this paper and the kind of interpretation Examiners look to reward.

All the Assessment Objectives in the syllabus are tested in this paper, making it an effective synoptic assessment of the skills candidates have developed throughout the course. However, practice with past poetry and prose questions instructs candidates in the slightly different reading skills and technical features of each genre, and can develop response to a wide range of different text types. The poems and extracts used will be challenging, and ask candidates to explore beyond surface meaning, investigate ambiguities and make their own personal response to the writing. They are helped by the guidance in the rubric, which clarifies the situation and context of the extract, the glossing of confusing or unusual vocabulary and the bullet points. These aim to focus candidates' responses on key features of the writing and questions of interpretation or personal response implicit in the stem question. The stem question itself is always focused on the writing and the writer's choices, and how these create particular effects on the reader. Candidates should pay close attention to the words in the stem question that indicate the nature of the personal response, such as striking, disturbing, inviting, intriguing, vividly, powerfully etc., as these provide an indication of the tone and mood created by the language of the text.

Candidates should be prepared to respond to either poetry or prose: in this session, poetry questions remain more popular although some weaker candidates choose the prose in order to write a straightforward response to the surface narrative. However, good responses to prose require just as much attention to the writer's choices of language and effects as a response to poetry, and critical awareness of some of the particular tools for analysis of narrative, such as the choice of point of view or narrative voice, and the use of dialogue and description to make an impact on the reader.

AO1 Knowledge supported by textual reference

In the unseen paper, AO1 represents knowledge of the surface narrative of a poem or prose passage, supported by appropriate textual reference. Although some texts in this session were short, they were complex, and good use of the 20 minutes of preparation time was essential to avoid misunderstandings. Candidates should identify key turning points and changes of tone or structure in poems, and changes of focus or viewpoint or narrative developments in the prose. Some misunderstandings arise when candidates do not read beyond the line ending of a line of verse or pay too little attention to who is speaking in passages

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of dialogue. Often the focus in reading the prose is more on what is happening than whose thoughts and feelings are being described, which can lead to an over-literal interpretation. Some candidates are more keen to show their knowledge of poetic form or literary terms, rather than think about the relationship of the text's rhetoric and language features to what is said. First paragraphs are much more impressive when they convey an accurate overview of what the poem or passage describes than when they simply provide a list of features. Quotation is a good way to show close engagement with how the writer makes meaning in a text, but lengthy quotations and paraphrase only show surface understanding. For higher marks, deeper understanding, analysis of effects and a personal response to individual and overall aspects of tone and mood are all crucial.

AO2 Understanding at a deeper level

A deep level of understanding is the key to higher marks, looking beyond the surface meaning of the text and exploring why the writer wrote it and what impact it is intended to make on the reader. This level of understanding cannot be reached on a first reading, which is why a re-reading of the text and a careful mark-up of a plan is essential before beginning to write. Candidates should look at the text in the light of how it ends, and chart its development through different stages, with attention to the structure of the whole text as well as the deeper meaning of individual images or phrases. The bullet points often give candidates some assistance, by drawing attention to particular images or structural contrasts. Syntax and stanza structure in poetry or paragraphing in prose can help to identify key developments, so there is a close link between AO2 and AO3. Patterns of imagery, or developments in characterisation as well as narrative events, can be indications of a deeper meaning to the text than the story it appears to be telling. This is especially true of poetry, of course, which is a form based on strong figurative uses of language encouraging reader interpretation of the connection between the image and the subject matter. Stronger responses are tentative when interpretation is not straightforward, using phrases like 'this suggests that' or 'this could be seen as 'or 'this might be interpreted as'.

AO3 Language, structure and form

Attention to details of the writer's craft is crucial to success in this paper, and when preparing their responses the stronger candidates mark up the poem or prose passage, highlighting key images or phrasing and identifying their relationship to the overall structure of the text. Imagery in the form of metaphors and similes is often prominent in prose as well as poetry; however, only poems contain enjambment and caesura. Although candidates are right to look at the rhythm and pattern of phrases and sentences in prose, this is very different from exploring the effects of sound and metre in poetry. In prose, the choice of narrative voice, characterisation through dialogue, creation of tension, suspense and climax replace the lyrical or dramatic viewpoint of the poem and its development through stanza form. In both, asking why the writer made those choices of language and structure helps the candidate to deepen their overall understanding of the whole poem and shape an informed personal response. The more candidates write about the effect of the literary features of the text, the more they shape an interpretation of the overall impression the text makes on the reader.

AO4 Personal response and interpretation

This Assessment Objective applies to the whole response, which should take the form of an interpretation of the text and its impact on the candidate, as a reader. The stem question encourages them to explain the impact and mood of the text as a whole, supported by analysis of detail. Personal response is not merely subjective, or the expression of a personal opinion about the subject matter of the text; it is a developed critical response to the style and structure of the writing. Weaker responses sometimes get distracted by the situation described, especially in a prose text, or show insufficient reflection on how the text ends. Usually, the final lines or sentences are especially helpful in forming an overall interpretation. Answers need to be sufficiently well-planned and selective to ensure that comments on the closing part of a text are as thoughtful as those on its opening. Good conclusions to arguments are a development of ideas and observations throughout the essay rather than a repetition of points made earlier, so the final paragraph of an unseen answer should bring together knowledge, understanding and the effects of language and structure. A response which shows critical understanding has awareness of why the writer wrote the text, and its intended effect on the reader.

In practice for this paper, candidates should develop a realistic sense of how much they can write in the time allowed, and past papers are invaluable for this. Practice in writing effective opening paragraphs and strong conclusions with clear overall interpretations is also very valuable, and easy to organise in class time. Peer assessment of stronger and weaker opening and closing paragraphs can help learners to see what is most effective in exam conditions, as well as develop their understanding of the texts themselves.

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Comments on specific questions

Question 1

The poem 'War Poet' was by the Second World War poet Sidney Keyes, who left Oxford for military service and was killed in action in 1943 in North Africa aged just 20. The poem was written just before he began military training. Those candidates who thought about the implications of the title made a good start to their response, as the poem is full of juxtapositions of the poet's past and present lives, indicated by the poet's use of past and present tense and imagery that depicts how he 'groped for words' and 'found an arrow in my hand.' Strong responses to the image of 'my face is a burnt book' linked this to the poet's vocation as well as the destruction of war, and the fear that war would destroy the part of him that was able to write. However, many responses showed more engagement with war than with poetry, and there was a tendency to write about the poet's imagery very literally, and to see him as a wounded or disabled veteran. Many candidates were influenced by their knowledge of First World War poetry, especially that of Wilfred Owen. Hence 'my own eyes barbed' encouraged them to think about trench warfare rather than the post-appeasement state of the nation in 1942. However, responses that engaged closely with the imagery of warfare, destruction and 'a slipping land' could be rewarded even if the context showed some misunderstanding.

Some candidates read 'eyes barbed' and 'an arrow in my hand' very literally as indications that the poet had been blinded or disfigured in action, and a few read the arrow imagery as echoing images of Christian martyrdom. Good responses linked these images to the bullet point suggesting candidates looked at 'the ways in which war had changed him' and saw changes to the poet's vision in a more metaphorical sense, as an image of a world at war, or the horrors that war exposes which cannot be unseen. This was then often effectively linked to the suggestion that the poet's pen had been replaced by an archaic weapon of war, giving a timeless context to human conflict, with violence taking the place of words. As one candidate put it, this *'symbolises a point of no return for the poet's life ... the arrow being a metaphor for his weapon, a gun, replacing a pen or quill, cementing the poet as a man of war and no longer the young man of book, quill and verses.'*

Most candidates worked effectively with the poet's patterning of long and short lines and how he contrasts a man who 'looked for peace' and build 'firm walls', either to protect his country or himself, and now found those certainties and sense of identity slipping away. Many linked this to the fears of madness which the poet seems to express in the later lines of the poem and appreciated the erosion of identity under attack. Some explored more modern ideas of post-traumatic stress and wanted to see the poem as written by an injured veteran after the war, although the poet's use of the present tense in most of the poem suggests that conflicts are very much ongoing and his fears are anticipatory. Stronger answers often included the observation that the poet speaks of 'when' he will grow sick or mad, not 'if' and it was quite valid to link this to fears of PTSD or echoes of First World War shellshock. Equally some found echoes of the trauma of more recent conflicts and wrote poignantly about the effects of conflict on individuals and their confidence.

Candidates differed about the 'slipping land' within the poet's 'firm walls': some linked this to the disappearance of hopes for peace in the first line, some to the loss of the self-assurance of the poet's repeated 'I am's in the alternating lines, and some to national fears of defeat and loss of control. All of these were valid readings if well-supported by quotations from the text and appropriate links. The brevity of the poem and the different focus of each bullet point often encouraged candidates to revisit metaphors in a constructive way, and often their second thoughts, reviewing the image in the light of the whole poem, were more effective. Similarly, more effective comment on the poet's 'fears' in the second bullet, did not link them to one single line but explored different forms of apprehension throughout the poem. Many found the image 'When I reach for the wind/Cast me not down' difficult to pull apart. Most thought 'the wind' was a symbol of Freedom so for some this was a symbol of escape or even death. Some felt it was a metaphor for the unreachable. Others suggested that this was an indication of suicidal thoughts, while some saw it as defiance and an indication that he still had aspirations. Stronger responses took up the religious implications of the second phrase, with one candidate writing that the poet 'views himself a demonic entity that would need to be cast away'. Some thought this showed his feelings of guilt for complicity in the crimes of war. Another candidate took this further powerfully suggesting *'this line can be considered a biblical allusion as it mirrors the scene where God throws the devil from heaven to the flames of hell. This powerful image convers to the reader how the poet fears to be condemned or demonised by the society around him potentially because of the death and destruction done by soldiers in every war.'*

The brevity of the poem caused some candidates problems: they wanted to turn it into a sonnet or to regularise its structure. Some called the poem free verse which it clearly is not, although its rhythms and use

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of rhyme alternate and vary. Stronger responses saw the return to more overt structure in the final lines as an indication that the poet had accepted the patterns of life and death implicit in going to war and his new identity as a soldier. Some commented on the frequent use of enjambment as an indication that he was caught up in circumstances beyond his control, with inevitable consequences. This was linked effectively to the idea of acceptance of the possibility of death or the destruction of war. Some thought there was a death wish or that he felt his identity as a poet no longer had a purpose and used this to interpret the bleak final images of a 'burnt book' and a 'wasted town'. More literal readers thought that the poet was physically scarred or his vision impaired, while others, more alert to the way verse works, interpreted the images of destruction as a powerful poetic image of the universal nature of destruction in a world at war. One candidate wrote that *'this phrase burnt book could also signify his writing and creativity, and how the war has destroyed that part of him what was able to write'*. Some felt the poet was expressing guilt at carnage he might take part in, while others made appropriate reference to society's neglect of post-war trauma. The strongest responses linked these images to the form and imagery of other parts of the poem to appreciate how the poet's role and identity had changed in war to reflect the destruction wrought on its victims. While some felt the poem ended in despair, others felt the poet's imperatives – 'Mock me not' and 'Cast me not down' – showed a confidence and even heroism in his acceptance of his new identity as a 'War Poet'.

Question 2

This extract from Margaret's Attwood's *The Testaments* published in 2019, as a prequel to *The Handmaid's Tale,* proved almost as popular a choice as the poetry. Attwood wrote the novel at the time when she was engaging with a television series, and some candidates were clearly aware of the fictional world her novels are set in. However, this neither advantaged nor disadvantaged them, as the focus of this paper is on analysis of the passage. Weaker candidates often choose the prose question, as they can find it easier to demonstrate a literal understanding of the surface narrative; fewer candidates in this question showed critical understanding of the writer's purpose and the reasons behind her choices of narrative technique and style.

Candidates certainly engaged vigorously with the dystopian scenario and made strong personal responses to a world in which women's rights were trampled on so outrageously, some making parallels with contemporary issues involving sexism and misogyny, and writing empathetically with the lack of power that the women in the passage have to resist institutionalised injustice. Fewer candidates combined this with effective engagement with the writing itself, and it is the quality of literary response which Examiners were above all assessing. This required some understanding that this is a retrospective narrative told by one of the characters, Lydia. This information was given in the introductory rubric and clarifies the nature of the first-person narrative voice. Only a few picked up the passage's reference to 'what you might call my Gilead career', and the hint that Lydia is telling the story some time after the events, and after she had made her own compromises with the regime. Some candidates struggled to pick up who was who in the dialogue, confusing Katie, Anita and Lydia and their very different characters and reactions. However, most did pick up that Lydia is the strongest of the characters and the one who initially puts up most resistance. Stronger candidates realised that the description of the men who burst through the door and then proceed to take Katie into custody is also from Lydia's viewpoint and reflects her views about how men abuse their authority in Gilead. Some understood that the withholding of full information at the beginning of the passage is a technique for creating suspense and fear.

Good responses focused on the writer's craft and the creation of tension through fragmented dialogue and exclamatory language. Those who commented on the effects of short sentences, questions and exclamations, and the lack of clear explanation as recreating the panic of the women in the moment when their certainties collapsed, gained higher marks. As one candidate wrote: ''*the first line is 'we need to get out of the country'. This shows a sense of desperation that the women have. The use of 'need' shows the urgency of the situation the US is in and the danger there is for women''.* While the situation is alarming, a literary response also needed to look at the very different characterisation of Katie, Anita and Lydia. Katie is a pregnant mother and the one who most needs to escape. Because her greatest concern is for her unborn child – she 'was holding her hands protectively in front of her stomach', she has limits to her power of resistance. Although 'she screamed', ultimately she 'went through the door nonetheless' and is taken by the men to an unknown destination. One candidate characterised Katie well from her earlier response to Lydia: ''*If you're a woman'. The use of a short sentence by Katie at this point symbolises a sense of defeat by the whole situation as though it has truly shocked her and consumed her to the point when she has nothing more to say than is necessary''*. Anita is perhaps the weakest of the three, and breaks down into tears, but is also more realistic about the women's powerlessness than Lydia here: 'she already had a better grasp of the situation than I did'. Many commented on how Tessa ducks for cover the moment the men arrive and is the most pitiful of the women, 'shivering with terror'. In contrast Lydia '*throughout this moment in the extract tries to counterattack or debate the men. The phrase 'Why? They can not simply cut off your money!' shows her*

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growing and festering rage due to the predicament that everyone is in. She is defensive and the exclamation mark shows her fury and how she empathises with the women around her."

Candidates who could clearly distinguish between the characters could see how these different reactions and responses added drama to the situation, and stronger responses did not spend too long on the details of the first section of dialogue in order to explore the more implicit responses to the arrival of the men, which is the turning point of the passage. Here candidates who understood Lydia as narrator were more strongly placed to see her initial strength. She is after all in her own office and used to being in charge. Her exclamations – 'This is completely unconstitutional!', 'You could have knocked!' and 'Stop that!' – show her confidence and her attempt at defiance, and candidates who explored the language of the passage closely analysed the implications of how she is completely ignored by the men. They rightly felt this was rude, but stronger responses correctly saw this as an indication of just how much power had shifted, as the patriarchy reasserted itself. Some saw this as underlined by the almost comic descriptions of the men, as seen from Lydia's perspective, like extras in a B movie, with beer bellies, eyeglasses and 'a handlebar moustache' rather than looking like serious soldiers. Lydia's tone suggests the unreality of the situation for her, as she had to listen to a man saying 'I'm giving the orders', while when one of the younger men addressed Katie as 'ma'am' which might show that not all the men are yet comfortable with the change. The moment when Lydia says 'Shock was beginning to hit me: I felt cold' was seen by strong candidates as an indication of the moment when her resistance began to collapse.

There are also many details in the writing that candidates were right to find terrifying: the fact that the door was violently 'kicked in' when it was open anyway, that the men have 'submachines at the ready' and that they have a list with the women's names on it and know about Katie's pregnancy and lack of a husband all reinforce the idea that this was pre-planned and deliberately threatening, and as Katie says 'they must have been planning this for years'. Some candidates noted Lydia 'not yet realising that female laughter would soon be in short supply' as predicting sad times ahead for all women. Good answers noted the use of short sentences throughout the last section of the passage in order to maintain tension, and some candidates saw Katie's 'voice outside in the hall, diminishing' as emblematic of what will happen to women's voices under the new regime. By the end of the passage, even Lydia can longer resist or shout out: 'there was no point in denying who we were; they already knew'. Strong candidates saw the subservience which all totalitarian regimes insist on, illustrated by Tessa's 'terror' in the concluding sentence.

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LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 0475/43
Unseen

Key messages

- candidates should pay more attention to the specific techniques of prose analysis in preparing for this paper
- misunderstandings of surface meaning are rare, but candidates sometimes struggle with figurative meaning or appreciation of the writer's purpose
- candidates could be more careful to recognise a range of possible meanings and should look at what a text suggests rather than states directly
- analysis of the writer's craft and methods is the most effective way to evaluate the overall effect of a text
- personal response is interpretation grounded in the text, with especial attention to how the text ends.

General comments

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AO1 Knowledge supported by textual reference

In the unseen paper, AO1 represents knowledge of the surface narrative of a poem or prose passage, supported by appropriate textual reference. Although some texts in this session were short, they were complex, and good use of the 20 minutes of preparation time was essential to avoid misunderstandings. Candidates should identify key turning points and changes of tone or structure in poems, and changes of focus or viewpoint or narrative developments in the prose. Some misunderstandings arise when candidates don't read beyond the line ending of a line of verse or pay too little attention to who is speaking in passages of dialogue. Often the focus in reading the prose is more on what is happening than whose thoughts and

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feelings are being described, which can lead to an over-literal interpretation. Some candidates are more keen to show their knowledge of poetic form or literary terms, rather than think about the relationship of the text's rhetoric and language features to what is said. First paragraphs are much more impressive when they convey an accurate overview of what the poem or passage describes than when they simply provide a list of features. Quotation is a good way to show close engagement with how the writer makes meaning in a text, but lengthy quotations and paraphrase only show surface understanding. For higher marks, deeper understanding, analysis of effects and a personal response to individual and overall aspects of tone and mood are all crucial.

AO2 Understanding at a deeper level

A deep level of understanding is the key to higher marks, looking beyond the surface meaning of the text and exploring why the writer wrote it and what impact it is intended to make on the reader. This level of understanding cannot be reached on a first reading, which is why a re-reading of the text and a careful mark-up of a plan is essential before beginning to write. Candidates should look at the text in the light of how it ends, and chart its development through different stages, with attention to the structure of the whole text as well as the deeper meaning of individual images or phrases. The bullet points often give candidates some assistance, by drawing attention to particular images or structural contrasts. Syntax and stanza structure in poetry or paragraphing in prose can help to identify key developments, so there is a close link between AO2 and AO3. Patterns of imagery, or developments in characterisation as well as narrative events, can be indications of a deeper meaning to the text than the story it appears to be telling. This is especially true of poetry, of course, which is a form based on strong figurative uses of language encouraging reader interpretation of the connection between the image and the subject matter. Stronger responses are tentative when interpretation is not straightforward, using phrases like 'this suggests that' or 'this could be seen as 'or 'this might be interpreted as'.

AO3 Language, structure and form

Attention to details of the writer's craft is crucial to success in this paper, and when preparing their responses the stronger candidates mark up the poem or prose passage, highlighting key images or phrasing and identifying their relationship to the overall structure of the text. Imagery in the form of metaphors and similes is often prominent in prose as well as poetry; however, only poems contain enjambment and caesura. Although candidates are right to look at the rhythm and pattern of phrases and sentences in prose, this is very different from exploring the effects of sound and metre in poetry. In prose, the choice of narrative voice, characterisation through dialogue, creation of tension, suspense and climax replace the lyrical or dramatic viewpoint of the poem and its development through stanza form. In both, asking why the writer made those choices of language and structure helps the candidate to deepen their overall understanding of the whole poem and shape an informed personal response. The more candidates write about the effect of the literary features of the text, the more they shape an interpretation of the overall impression the text makes on the reader.

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This Assessment Objective applies to the whole response, which should take the form of an interpretation of the text and its impact on the candidate, as a reader. The stem question encourages them to explain the impact and mood of the text as a whole, supported by analysis of detail. Personal response is not merely subjective, or the expression of a personal opinion about the subject matter of the text; it is a developed critical response to the style and structure of the writing. Weaker responses sometimes get distracted by the situation described, especially in a prose text, or show insufficient reflection on how the text ends. Usually, the final lines or sentences are especially helpful in forming an overall interpretation. Answers need to be sufficiently well-planned and selective to ensure that comment on the closing part of a text are as thoughtful as those on its opening. Good conclusions to arguments are a development of ideas and observations throughout the essay rather than a repetition of points made earlier, so the final paragraph of an unseen answer should bring together knowledge, understanding and the effects of language and structure. A response which shows critical understanding has awareness of why the writer wrote the text, and its intended effect on the reader.

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Comments on specific questions

Question 1

This question was based on the poem 'Summer Evening' by the nineteenth-century English poet, John Clare. The poem describes the poet walking across fields, and his noticing of how the birds and animals react to his coming and going. The question asked candidates to explore how the poet vividly conveys the relationship between humans and nature. Candidates clearly found this an engaging text and task and the great majority wrote in a lively and responsive manner.

Most candidates grasped the central narrative of the text in terms of the poet's movements and the various responses of the different creatures described and were able to support this knowledge by means of appropriate textual reference (AO1). This, however, was not universally the case. Despite its brevity, the poem, as is the case perhaps with most sonnets, offers a certain challenge in terms of its compression and relative syntactical complexity. As has frequently been mentioned in previous reports and as has been alluded to above, students should be trained to follow the sense of a poetic text *across* the lines and not to see individual lines as necessarily sentences in themselves. This might have prevented, for example, some candidates reading 'nimbles' as a noun rather than a verb, as if these were another form of field creature with analogous feelings to those of the frog and the mouse. A key lapse for a minority of candidates was in failing to recognise the significance of 'Til past', signalling the poet's moving away and out of sight and earshot of the animals. Candidates who assumed that the poet was present in the field throughout – something which the second bullet makes clear is not the case – found themselves in a tangle, having to reconcile feelings of fear and apprehension with ones of merriment and relief. Candidates who based their commentary around the animals' collective pleasure and delight in the poet's company were understandably at something of a loss in attempting to make sense of the poem's closing lines. All this points to the fundamental importance, as suggested above, of careful, multiple re-readings of the text both in preparation and during the course of writing.

It was the candidates' response to the poem's last two lines which naturally proved to be the discriminator in terms of displaying their deeper understanding of the text (AO2). Many candidates showed a clear understanding of how the disturbing of the lives of the animals in the field, however benign and unintentional, is read by the poet himself as a metaphor for Man's relationship with Nature in a wider sense. This is a relationship in which arrogant Man holds the natural world in 'thrall' or in a state of subservience or enslavement and is one in which, as a result, all human beings are perceived as the common 'enemy' of the animal kingdom. Particularly strong scripts focused on the word 'link' and its indication, an ironic one perhaps, of the fundamental bond between Man and Nature, a bond which makes the division and conflict between the two all the more painful and melancholy for the poet.

Candidates were more likely to be drawn towards a perceptive observation such as this if they were attuned to the tone of the poet's 'voice' through the course of the poem. A thoughtful consideration of the tone or tones of a text ought to be a central aspect in any critical analysis (AO3) as this is invariably such a strong indicator of the text's meaning and purpose. It is clear that the poet takes pleasure in a close and affectionate observation of the creatures and their actions and in his imaginative re-creation of their feelings and emotions. The bond alluded to above underscores his use of anthropomorphism throughout. The animals react in the way people might if they were placed in similar circumstances and this heightens both the reader's identification with them and also their sympathy. Sensitive readings were receptive to the humorous elements of the poet's use of personification and his lively, sketched-out characterisation of their various personalities. Given the relative brevity of the text, candidates needed to be attentive to little details in the choice of language whether that be the 'half fearful' feelings of the frog or the dainty scurrying of the mouse suggested by 'nimbles' and its 'timid dread'. Strong scripts picked up on the comic playfulness of the language whether that be the alliterative 'merry moods' of the grasshoppers or how they 'wear / The short night weary'. Sensitive scripts drew out the connotations of the 'fretting' quality of their song or commented on the vivid fusion of sound and kinaesthetic image of movement in the yellowhammer's 'flutters in short fears'. A few scripts insightfully registered a sense of pathos in how the bird 'drops again', ostensibly in relief, but also suggesting a death or stunned reaction to its panicked agitation. As regards the movement of the poet himself, some candidates sensitively registered the gentle, unthreatening, natural sound of his 'rustling steps', although others, in contrast, sensed something sinister in the sibilance of the line.

Some candidates identified the poem as a sonnet and a few, citing the conventional association of the form with expressions of love, suggested that the poem might be read as a love poem to Nature, a potentially illuminating personal interpretation (AO4). Strong scripts focused on the poem's narrative 'turn' two syllables into the fifth line and how this is emphasised by the distinct caesura created by the use of the dash. Other

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sophisticated observations of this kind included the jittery, unstable effect on the rhythm of the first line as a result of the use of a pair of commas, reflecting the frog's sudden, darting leap. Most telling, perhaps, was the identification of the use of the couplet at the end of the poem to signal a reflective, summative conclusion, a sense enhanced by the 'Thus' at the beginning of the penultimate line. After the pattern of alternating rhymes in the rest of the poem, the pairing of 'thrall' and 'all' has a powerful and emphatic effect.

Perceptive responses read the poem as betokening a sadness at the state of the relationship between Man and Nature, perhaps even something tragic (AO4). In this, Man is a loser too, a hubristic but alienated being who has squandered his intimacy and fellowship with the natural life of which he is a part. Clare himself would have very likely concurred with such a sentiment. Likewise, as a Romantic, he would no doubt have been in sympathy with candidates who took a strongly polemical approach, reading the poem as an indictment of Man's ongoing destruction of the natural world. That being said, many candidates rather lost themselves in reference to such issues as the climate 'emergency', the loss of biodiversity, ecological degradation and so forth and were guilty of straying too far and for too long from the text itself – considerably so, in some cases. By the time we reached global environmental Armageddon, we seemed to have moved quite a long way from the pastoral depiction of an English summer evening and the little creatures of the field skipping into the corn to avoid the poet's boots.

Question 2

The question was based on an extract taken from the novel *Golden Hill* by Francis Spufford, the focal point of which is the lighting of a tremendous bonfire as part of a patriotic celebration as observed by Smith, a visitor to the city. Candidates were invited to explore how the writing makes this scene so striking. Candidates engaged with this task with great success on the whole and there were a significant number of exceptionally impressive responses. The extract provided much opportunity for close, sustained critical analysis in terms of authorial methods, techniques and effects. It is a fallacy – which perhaps still prevails in some quarters – that candidates are necessarily better served in this respect in opting for the poetry question. This particular extract, for instance, manifested considerably more examples of striking choices of diction, together with the intensive use of metaphor and symbol, than was the case with the Clare poem. It is imperative that centres encourage their students to read carefully *both* texts before coming to a decision, weighing up their relative appeal in a clear-sighted and open-minded manner.

Most candidates showed at least reasonably clear understanding of the central elements of the narrative (AO1): the lighting of the bonfire; the growth of the fire; its effects on the watching crowd; its contrast with the night sky and so forth. A key discriminator here lay in the use of quotation. Strong scripts displayed an ability to select phrases or single words to quote in a focused, precise manner, with particularly able candidates drawing material from different parts of the text to support their commentary convincingly and to persuasive effect. In contrast, candidates who quoted whole sentences or longer tended to blunt their critical response, blurring the point of focus, as well as significantly slowing their progress through the material. The facility for employing sharp, fluently integrated quotation to build an analysis remains an invaluable skill.

In terms of a deeper understanding of the text and what might be implicit (AO2), many candidates were able to engage with the complex and perhaps contradictory reactions to the fire which Smith observes in the crowd. In many scripts there was some extended comment on the 'excited fear' shown in people's expressions and the sense that 'something both horrifying and delightful' was being 'released'. Candidates read into the 'uptilted faces', feelings of wonder, awe and even possibly reverence. The fire appears as an embodiment of an alluring but fearfully violent and destructive power which draws almost the whole of the city's population together in a 'human ring' of unity and communality. Yet, for all that, many candidates grasped the fact that when the fire is set against the immensity of the night sky it is the latter which prevails. The final image is one of a world of darkness stretching both upwards and across the thousands of miles of land to the west which dwarfs both the fire and the city.

The vivid and strikingly physical character of the writing (AO3) is evident from the very first sentence with the 'thrust' of the torches into the bonfire's base to set it alight. Many candidates discussed the extensive use of metaphor in the depiction of the bonfire as a 'mountain', 'alp', 'summit' and 'peak' or as a voracious beast, 'gnawing' on the 'tormented' wood, pausing briefly for 'consumption'. The beauty and regality of the blaze was also suggested for some in how it bursts into 'a crown of yellow flame'. Particularly strong scripts were attentive to sentence structure noting, for example, how the brevity of 'A pause' was set against the length and syntactical complexity of the sentence which follows, suggestive of the intricate movements of the nascent fire and their growing momentum. This latter effect was emphasised by the use of insistent repetition – 'always up, up, up…' while the culmination of the process was underscored with a return to terse simplicity – 'The bonfire was ablaze.'

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What struck many candidates was the sensuousness of the writing and its dramatic appeal to the senses. Some focused on the aural imagery in the depiction of the fire from the onomatopoeic effects of 'crackle, crack…quick dry popping' to the later 'furnace roar' and sounds 'like many distant glass windows shattering'. Others discussed in detail the extract's visual effects such as the vivid use of colour ('red', 'yellow', orange-gold', 'crimson') or in the extended metaphor of the bonfire transmuting at one moment into 'a river running' and then a volcano with its 'rising, rising lava-flows', 'particulate tides' and 'stippling of black stuff…like slag on molten iron'. The drama of its shape-shifting evolution reaches its climax in the extended metaphor of its battle for dominance with the night-sky as it 'assailed' it and 'pushed' upwards into the cold air until 'The fiery glare blanked out the stars'. Yet, ironically, the very size and intensity of the inferno only seems to emphasise 'the hugeness of the night' and the true scale of 'the immense darkness', in the face of which 'the sparks recoiled defeated'. It is these dark heavens that now instead become the object of awe and wonderment in the breathless exclamation 'That sky!'

Much sensitive personal response was evident during the course of analysis of this kind and the strongest scripts evinced an interpretative, evaluative approach to the writer's possible intentions (AO4). Some saw the extract as depicting the happy, excited atmosphere of a bonfire celebration while others commented on human beings' abiding fascination with fire. For some, this fascination had a darker, primal quality betokening how we are naturally drawn to danger, violence and destruction. More than one candidate indicated the depth of this impulse in suggesting that the 'ring' which the crowd forms had connotations of their being wedded to the fire and the forces it embodies. The most impressive responses tended to focus on the fire's 'defeat' and how the night-sky's victory suggested the dominance of the power of the natural world over that of humanity and the latter's efforts at 'assertion'. Some outstanding scripts were able to absorb the sketched out historical context provided in the rubric in order to make insightful observations regarding the situation of these early settlers to the New World. The precariousness of their existence is suggested in how 'the little city perched' on the very edge of the continent. However, 'defiant' the flame which represents them, it is a mere 'pinpoint' within the vast, mysterious and forbidding darkness all around.

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LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 0475/05
Coursework

Key messages

Successful responses:

- show a detailed knowledge of texts
- focus explicitly on a task that enables candidates to reach the higher levels
- use relevant, concise references to support analysis
- analyse in detail ways in which writers achieve their effects.

Less successful responses:

- have only a basic knowledge of surface meanings
- lose focus on the task because candidates do not select material relevant to the task
- make unsupported assertions
- list techniques without analysing precise ways in which writers achieve their effects.

General comments

There was much evidence of coursework of a high standard this session, where candidates showed perceptive and convincing informed personal responses to texts; these responses sustained a clear critical understanding informed by an impressive command of textual detail. There was much evidence that candidates had enjoyed studying their coursework texts and had taken the opportunity to develop their skills of researching, drafting and presenting their assignments. Texts studied included *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Purple Hibiscus*, *A Christmas Carol, Macbeth* and a variety of short stories and poems. Empathy tasks are still a popular option for some centres.

The most successful assignments sustained a clear focus on a carefully worded task that enabled candidates to meet the requirements of the highest levels set out in the level descriptors. It is important that tasks direct candidates to analyse ways in which writers achieve their effects. Where tasks did not do this, candidates tended to treat characters as real-life people (rather than fictional or dramatic constructs); in such responses, there was little appreciation of the writer's craft. Where necessary, individual centres have been directed to guidance on effective task-setting in the 0475/0992 Coursework Training Handbook.

Although some less successful responses showed a detailed knowledge of the text, they lacked a clear focus on the task. Because of this, some assignments read like character sketches. In other responses, candidates were intent on listing themes they had studied, which resulted in an inconsistent focus on the task. The more successful candidates grasped the importance of selecting material in a way that directly addresses the task set, with every sentence contributing to the relevance of the unfolding argument. This skill will help candidates in their preparation for the examination papers where, in the 45 minutes allocated to set text questions, candidates must select rather than write exhaustively.

The most convincing and persuasive essays sustained a critical engagement with ways in which writers achieve their effects (Assessment Objective 3), relating their points to the task. As in previous sessions, some poetry assignments simply logged features such as alliteration, caesura, enjambment and ABAB rhyme schemes without exploring how the writer uses these devices to convey their ideas. This led to assignments that were overly reliant on description rather than close analysis.

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Several centres submitted empathic responses, with the necessary information supplied: the name of the character and the precise moment in the text that the interior monologue takes place. Centres should encourage their candidates to select their own character and moment for empathic responses to encourage informed personal responses to texts.

Guidance for teachers

It is important that centres comply with the requirements of the Coursework folder, which are set out in the syllabus. For example, assignments must:

- select from the whole prose or drama text (and not focus exclusively on individual chapters or scenes)
- be based on texts that have the same level of demand as IGCSE set texts.

Guidance on task-setting can be found in the Coursework Handbook, which stresses the importance of **(a)** wording tasks that direct candidates explicitly to explore ways in which writers achieve their effects and **(b)** avoiding the use of insufficiently challenging command words such as 'Describe' and 'Explain'. Teachers within a centre should together discuss the appropriateness of proposed tasks before they are given to candidates. This enables any problems with proposed tasks to be resolved early during the course.

There follows a reminder of what constitutes good practice in the presentation of coursework folders:

1. Start each assignment with the full wording of the task. In the case of empathic responses, the chosen character and moment should be clearly stated. This is important since it allows the Moderator to determine how successfully the candidate has captured an authentic voice for the character and moment.
2. Use focused ticking in the body of the text to indicate valid points, together with concise marginal and summative comments which relate to the wording of the level descriptors. This provides information to the external Moderator about how the final mark was arrived at. Avoid words such as 'superficial', 'thin', 'brilliant' and 'wow' which do not feature in the level descriptors. Ensure that any mark changes from internal standardisation are supported by comments from the second marker and that the moderated mark is recorded on the Individual Candidate Record Card and transferred to the summary forms and MS1 (or centre equivalent).
3. Provide a brief explanation on the assignment itself or on the cover sheet in cases where marks are changed during internal moderation. Such purposeful annotation aids transparency and contributes to the robustness of the assessment as it allows a centre to provide a rationale for the marks it awards.

The following examples of unhelpful annotation should be avoided: excessive ticking (for example, of every paragraph or every line); hyperbolic praise of work of indifferent quality; labelling by assessment objective. Simply putting the supposed relevant AO in the margin is of very little benefit to any subsequent reader, as it does not reveal the *extent* to which a particular assessment objective has been addressed; instead, more specific reference should be made to the wording of the level descriptors.

Most centres carried out administration efficiently, using the current version of the Individual Candidate Record Card, and securing it by treasury tag or staple to allow easy access to candidate work. In well-administered centres, care had been taken to:

- include all candidates on the Coursework Assessment Summary Form in candidate number order
- transcribe totals accurately across the various documents.

All centres are advised to include a final clerical checking stage in their moderation procedures before submitting their paperwork to Cambridge. This check should be carried out by a different person from the one who originally completed the Coursework Assessment Summary Forms and Mark Sheets. The official moderation checklist should be included with the sample folders.

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