

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 2010/12

Paper 12

Key messages

Detailed knowledge of texts is not on its own sufficient for high reward. Candidates must tailor their detailed knowledge to the demands of the question.

In their critical responses candidates must include analysis of the effects writers create in order to convey their meanings.

Responses to extract-based questions should engage with the detail and language of the extract, by selecting relevant words and phrases to address the question.

Personal responses to texts should be informed responses, that is, substantiated by apt textual detail.

General comments

The most successful critical responses demonstrated a detailed knowledge of texts and a sustained engagement with the question. Some candidates started their responses well but lost focus part of the way through the essay – as they perhaps veered towards a topic they had covered before. A minority of responses struggled to communicate personal responses to characters, themes and settings. There were a few instances of responses starting with extraneous background information, sometimes at great length, before addressing the key words of the question. Some answers showed remarkably little evidence of thorough knowledge of the chosen texts and this was revealed not only in the general essays but also in the extract-based questions which some candidates appeared to treat as ‘Unseen’ passages.

The strongest responses to Drama texts acknowledged the text as a play, i.e. something to be performed on a stage. These responses invariably referred to the ‘play’ rather than ‘book’ and to the ‘audience’ rather than ‘reader’. They also explored the words of the dialogue, not merely relying on stage directions to indicate the emotions of characters.

IGCSE Literature critical essay questions make reference to the writer. Key words in questions include ‘Explore’, ‘How?’ and ‘In what ways?’ These are all designed to encourage a critical engagement with a writer’s techniques. Such an engagement requires a consideration of the ways in which writers shape and convey meanings. The strongest responses were skilful at combining precise analytical comment and concise, useful reference. Less successful responses tended to log features and found it difficult, therefore, to go beyond a descriptive approach. Sometimes comments were so unhelpfully general as to be true of any text: ‘The description draws you in’; ‘The writer uses strong words’; ‘It makes you feel as if you are there’.

In 45-minute responses candidates are not required to provide exhaustive responses. For extract-based questions, for example, they need to select detail carefully from the extract in order to answer the question effectively. Where candidates attempted exhaustive commentaries on extracts or poems, they tended to produce superficial responses. Some candidates did a brief plan before starting to write their answer, and this helped them to organise their ideas effectively.

The strongest critical responses made judicious use of textual reference. They made frequent, concise and pertinent references to the texts and integrated the references flawlessly into their own writing. Less effective responses used quotations, sometimes quite lengthy ones, to illustrate a point but did not take the opportunity to explore the language of the key words. The least effective responses made mere assertions.

The best empathic responses created a convincingly authentic voice for the character and showed a clear appreciation of both the character and moment specified in the question. Additionally they rooted their

responses in the detail of the text. The least successful empathic responses struggled to capture a suitable voice and/or neglected to include textual detail for support.

There were relatively few rubric errors though there seemed to be an increasing tendency for candidates to number questions wrongly or not to number their questions at all. Work was generally well presented.

Comments on Specific Questions

Section A DRAMA

ARTHUR MILLER: All My Sons

Question 1

Less successful answers made appropriate points but did not back them up with textual support. Most understood the general situation at this moment in the play, and there was often a focus on the tension between the three characters. Larry was often discussed at some length, at the expense of consideration of the actual text of the extract. Candidates tended to show a clearer understanding of Kate than of the other two and Chris was often neglected. Weaker answers generally did not take into account when in the play this moment comes: there was confusion about who – the audience included – knows what, at this point. Better responses noted the tension generated by the stage directions (the range of tones, the movement on stage). A few responses were perceptive about the contrast between Kate's over-protested, relatively long speeches and Ann's terse rebuttals.

Question 2

Most answers showed knowledge of the character, had the right quotations ready, and focused on the 'power of the play'. Most showed a good understanding of Jim and his dramatic function as a foil to Joe and as a disappointed idealist who lives in 'the usual darkness'; the character who knows all of the play's truth and who controls the play's dramatic/emotional temperature. Some strong answers focused on what Jim knew about Joe, and why he said nothing. Weaker responses demonstrated some uncertain knowledge of the character and his function in the play. Differentiation came from the extent to which answers went beyond character sketch to consider dramatic function.

Question 3

This empathic question offered candidates a good opportunity to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of both character and text, given the pivotal nature of the moment. Candidates who grasped the despair and self-loathing Joe is experiencing by this stage tended to have more success in achieving a convincing voice than those who attempted self-justification or attempted to blame Kate for helping to hush things up. Overall, this was a reasonably successful option for those candidates who chose it. Many missed the task's 'You are in your room' and made the mistake of writing in the past tense – offering narrative, interspersed with the odd emotional comment.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: Julius Caesar

Question 4

Less successful answers gave only limited attention to the actual passage and spent too much time on narration of the events leading up to Caesar's assassination. Better answers were able to state clearly the characteristics of Caesar on display in this extract: his arrogance, his pride, his susceptibility to flattery, his superstition, maybe his fickle nature, maybe his naivety, and then explore clearly how these are brought to light. The failure to explore the 'how' of the question was what limited many of the responses. Some stronger answers attempted to engage with the writer's technique, commenting, for example, on Caesar's referring to himself in the third person and on the language that Decius uses to 'massage Caesar's ego'. Some conflated Decius Brutus and Marcus Brutus, with very misleading results. Relatively few candidates considered the last part of the extract at all, and only the best in any depth.

Question 5

In less successful answers, focus on the question was not sharp. Many had clearly prepared for a ‘Brutus’ question and wrote competently about Brutus, ignoring the crux of the actual question: the extent to which our view of Brutus *changes*. Frequently, the question was interpreted as being ‘how does Brutus change during the play’, rather than how the audience’s view of him changes. Consequently, many weaker responses were basically character descriptions. A number of responses attempted to answer the question using the question 4 extract – often compounding the difficulty this created by assuming Decius and Brutus were one and the same. Relatively few candidates moved far beyond the opening scenes of the play to consider Brutus following the death of Caesar. The best answers were very well informed; often with excellent textual recall. Most candidates – but by no means all – were aware of the honourable nature of Brutus and explored to some effect how an honourable man could kill his friend and how this affected their response to him. Many argued that he never lost his honourable nature throughout and were able to quote Antony’s eulogy at the end of the play in support. Some candidates saw Brutus as power-hungry and unscrupulous, and were never able to supply textual evidence for their opinion.

Question 6

Most answers found difficulty in capturing a voice for Octavius, although his ambition was recognised. Of the few candidates who attempted to assume the voice, a number were unable to tie the speech to the relevant ‘moment’ of the play and used general material from later than the immediate post-meeting moment asked about. Several mistook the moment, and had Octavius hurrying back to Rome to prevent the assassination of Caesar. Many did capture something of Octavius’s strength of purpose and determination even when the voice was not distinctive.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *The Tempest*

Question 7

The extract proved accessible for most candidates who chose this option, and most were able to identify some of the ways in which it was entertaining. Few were able to go on to analyse how the language of the extract enhanced the effect. Better answers tended to identify the contribution Ariel made to the overall comedy, thereby showing awareness of the play in performance. Some candidates offered interesting ideas on the scene as a parody of colonisation, but these ideas needed to be linked to the question to gain full credit. For ‘entertaining’, most candidates read ‘humorous’. Some simply said that the scene is funny because three characters are drunk, bickering and rowdy, and confused by Ariel’s intervention. Almost all responses noted that it was amusing that Ariel was behind the confusion of the passage, and many noted the amusing violence – though most needed to argue more fully why and how the violence was actually amusing. Differentiation came from the extent to which the comic richness of the language was explored – what the characters call, and how they address, one another; the best answers sensed serious foundations – to do with power, status etc. – of this comic richness. The best answers were able to offer a good range of material and mention Shakespeare’s authorial presence behind the action or the language of its presentation.

Question 8

This was often handled well, particularly by those candidates who recognised that the ‘How far’ in the question implied that a balanced response was expected. Nearly all candidates found something to say about Prospero’s treatment of Miranda, Ariel and Caliban. Often, this was little more than narrative, and often relied disproportionately on Prospero’s account to Miranda of their arrival on the island. Many candidates simply wrote about how Prospero was admirable – as a father and/or as a slave-master. Better candidates were able to offer much more, and even explore these two basic points in more subtle and thoughtful detail. Some saw him as an evil coloniser, while others saw him as a god-like figure dispensing forgiveness rather than revenge.

Question 9

Some candidates found difficulty in developing a voice for Sebastian. This difficulty was compounded by a failure to identify the character correctly – several candidates wrote as Ferdinand. Some more successful responses displayed considerable knowledge of Sebastian and his part in proceedings, although there were some who offered an unregenerate character wanting to get back to Naples to have another go at Alonso.

OSCAR WILDE: *The Importance of Being Earnest*

Question 10

Some of the candidates who offered responses to this question were able to identify quite clearly the moments of comedy and the best of these were also able to discuss reasonably effectively how Wilde was able to make these hilarious. There were comments on the visual humour in Cecily's treatment of Gwendolen and the use of language parallels. Most candidates were able to respond relevantly though many still find it very hard to show how something is 'hilarious' or the ways in which Wilde makes it so, largely because they are unable to explore in sufficient detail the language he uses in doing this. Many forgot that it is a play, and ignored the stage directions – some believing that Gwendolen's 'Detestable girl! But I require tea!' is heard by Cecily. Others interpreted the tea party as a misunderstanding, rather than combat as a result of a prior misunderstanding. The best responses sensed social satire and critique. Weaker answers focused on Victorian social criticism in general terms, and this also contributed to the lack of success in answering this question.

Question 11

Very few candidates attempted this question, and those who did showed at best a rather shaky grasp of the character and of what he did that was amusing. Good candidates were able to point to the humour of this mature man of the cloth deeply and simpering in love and his eagerness to please Jack and Algernon. Again, some candidates wrote about the role of the church in Victorian times, missing the (much simpler) point.

Question 12

There were a few good Lady Bracknell's, the voice ringing true(ish) and with suitable content, but too many moved beyond the specified moment to give a summary of the ensuing scene. Lady Bracknell's overbearing voice eluded most, often being replaced by an unconvincingly worried mother or aunt. Her need for Algernon's musical services was mentioned by only a few, and there was often an anachronistic knowledge of Mr Worthing's circumstances. Conversely, cucumber sandwiches loomed large.

SECTION B: POETRY

THOMAS HARDY: *Selected Poems*

Question 13

Answers tended to be descriptive, with little consideration of the 'feelings' in the question. Good answers discussed the speaker's feelings of isolation, and possibly bitterness, by consideration of the language used, the night setting of the poem, the passing of the motor car and the despair of the conclusion, considering the words and images of the poem and the effects created. Weaker answers read the poem as an autobiographical episode, (e.g. the poet is waiting for his wife to return from hospital) and did not distinguish between poet and speaker. Those who kept Hardy –the man- out of it were more successful in engaging with language and technique.

Question 14

Answers met with some success as they seemed to understand some of the thematic concerns on display, in particular the idea of the permanence of basic human emotions.

Question 15

This was not well tackled. Most answers chose *The Going*, and focused in general biographical terms on Hardy's life and marriage rather than engaging with the poem itself. Very little sense of the writing emerged from answers, and there was little attempt to deal with 'vividly'.

SONGS OF OURSELVES: from Part 4

Question 16

Weaker answers showed little understanding of Bhatt's feelings or how she conveys these. There were also some very hazy ideas of what 'culture' means. Candidates might have performed better if they had begun by defining their own terms as examiners allowed a wide range of interpretations of the word. Very few candidates attempted to answer the question, offering instead general narration or paraphrase of the first 18 lines of the poem, often ignoring the final section altogether. Weaker answers offered a kind of translation of the poem, but often in doing so revealed a lack of understanding. Many made no comment at all about colonisation in the second stanza. Better answers were able to reveal a basic understanding of the content, and show some awareness of Bhatt's anger in the second stanza. Some noted the different form of the second stanza but made little analysis of the language. A few good responses were able to get down to looking at the poet's word choices and show how these revealed feelings 'vividly'. In these good answers, where the poem had clearly been studied in detail, responses interpreted lines from the poem as metaphors for different attitudes to cultures and provided effective argument supported by relevant quotation. For most, where the final 10 lines of the poem were considered at all, this took the form of a series of vague generalisations about colonialism.

Question 17

Only the most successful responses adapted their knowledge and understanding of *Pike* to consider the focus of the question on the poet's feelings about nature. Many candidates were able to describe in detail the poetic creation of the pike but very few then applied that to Hughes' feelings about nature, in other words they were unable to make the necessary intellectual leap from narrative to supported speculation. Some misread the question as being about the nature of the pike. Understanding of the poem also suffered from imposed readings, for example that the pike was a representation of human nature, beautiful on the outside but evil within. Sadly, therefore, some good candidates might have let themselves down by simply not reading the question.

Question 18

The two 'planners' poems were popular and appropriate choices to tackle the question. Weaker answers tended to write in general terms about city life, with little or no consideration of the 'strong reactions' mentioned in the question. Candidates were well prepared, but instead of being selective and focusing on 'strong reactions and aspects of city life', in order to answer the question, some wrote everything they knew about their poem.

SECTION C: PROSE

TSITSI DANGAREMBGA: *Nervous Conditions*

Question 19

This question generated an interesting range of responses. Many candidates were shocked at Babamukuru's violence towards his daughter, although for many, his use of the term 'whore' was more shocking than the physical violence displayed. In some answers, this was accepted as reasonable parental behaviour, and the shock was that his daughter should retaliate in kind. Weaker responses were directed towards the behaviour of the characters, and how that behaviour reflected some of the themes of the novel, at the expense of consideration of the detail of the extract. Some very good answers dealt with the surprise because of what they had previously come to expect of the characters, and wrote relevantly about the fact that Maiguru and Chido had to intervene; better candidates were able to explore the language in detail, and sometimes effectively separated the shocking from the surprising to good effect. Such answers were well-reasoned and supported with a good range of relevant material drawn from across the whole passage.

Question 20

This was another example of a question where many candidates ignored 'To what extent' and instead listed ways in which Jeremiah is weak. Most recognised his laziness and his treatment of Tambu, often relating this to some of the themes of the novel, for instance, arguing that he could get away with this behaviour because of the patriarchal society. Few considered his subservient position in the wider family hierarchy, or his treatment of his wife and her sister, or his willingness to take credit for the achievements of others.

Question 21

Generally the ‘moment’ was well understood but some candidates confused this with the moment covered in question 19, thereby creating a good deal of confusion. There were some strong responses from candidates who recognised Babamukuru’s intense sense of his own importance as head of the family and captured a credible conflict between his desire to keep his public image undisturbed and a sense of irritation or distress at his wife’s rebellion. Many of the better responses were able to capture the weighty, self-important tone of the character whilst still conveying concern, anxiety, and – some suggested – slight feelings of guilt and remorse. A good range of relevant reference was necessary here, and better candidates were able to supply this.

ANITA DESAI: Fasting, Feasting

Question 22

This question elicited some excellent responses. Some candidates used the question as an opportunity to write, often with some passion, about the treatment of women in some traditional Indian societies, without paying much, if any, attention to the extract itself or to Desai’s writing. There were some excellent close readings, with attention paid to lighting, tone, time, unfolding, point of view, structure as well as pointing out the uncertainties about Anamika’s death and the lack of reaction of her relatives. Weaker answers merely summarised the extract, without considering what was ‘disturbing’ about this moment.

Question 23

Most answers found something relevant to say. Many were able to find enough textual references to demonstrate ways in which Uma’s life was full of disappointment. There was a good deal of condemnation of Mamapapa for their repressive treatment of their daughter, often linked to generalisations about the role of women in Indian society. Relatively few went on to offer a balanced assessment – implied by the word ‘fair’ in the question. Those who did tended to take account of her moments of escape from the confines of the family.

Question 24

As with several of the empathic questions in the Prose section of the paper, less successful answers sometimes confused what the character would think and what the candidate thought they ought to think. In the case of Arun, several candidates thought that regret at leaving the Patton household would figure prominently, and that he would be feeling overwhelmingly grateful to Mrs Patton in particular for her care for him. Most candidates showed reasonable knowledge of the events in the American part of the novel, but were not always able to convince that they had understood their significance.

KIRAN DESAI: Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard

Question 25

Candidates made good use of the passage to show how different a light on the Brigadier’s character it throws and there were some perceptive responses. Sound selection of material to prove what the Brigadier is normally like, here at the outset of the passage and elsewhere earlier in the novel, was contrasted efficiently with the surprisingly soft and in some ways vulnerable man he appears once he espies the bird. Better candidates made very good use of the contrast and best answers got down to looking at individual words and phrases, revealing a genuine engagement with Desai’s writing. Weaker answers did not really identify the surprise of the revelation of another side to his character, but offered description or paraphrase.

Question 26

This question presented difficulties for candidates who did not understand the term ‘self-important’. Examiners accepted a broad definition of the term, and some successful answers were written about Pinkie and Mr Chawla in particular. Some candidates wrote about substantial parts of the novel, stretching the meaning of the term ‘moment’, and for some, ‘ridiculous’ was addressed only by implication.

Question 27

The empathic question was frequently attempted with some success. Many candidates appreciated the different aspects of Sampath's character, and often achieved an appropriate voice. Others stressed guilt, regret and shame, reflecting perhaps what the candidates thought Sampath ought to have been feeling. The best answers reflected his lack of regret, his pleasure about his performance at the wedding, and the prospect of freedom from the oppressions in his life, with, sometimes, some anxieties about what his father might say. Generally, at whatever level of achievement, candidates communicated their enjoyment of this particular text.

GEORGE ELIOT: *Silas Marner*

Question 28

Most candidates managed to identify and highlight parts of the extract which showed Dunsey's unpleasantness quite well, although comments on Eliot's use of language were sparse. There was a general appreciation of the situation between the brothers and supporting quotation was often selected quite effectively, although there was a tendency for candidates to move from considering the extract to offering a narrative of subsequent events. Better responses were able to focus on the language used by Eliot, almost always picked up on the way even the dog reacts to the villainous Dunstan, and often even Dunstan's body language. Generally most candidates were able to make some relevant response to this question.

Question 29

Some candidates who attempted this question struggled with the meaning of 'amusing' even though it is a term that has been used on this syllabus for a long time. For some, it appeared to mean 'amazing', for others 'pleasingly instructive'. Some candidates selected completely inappropriate moments e.g. Dunsey robbing Marner and attempted to create convoluted arguments to justify their choice. Most answers offered narrative accounts of incidents – often Lantern Yard and the arrival of Eppie – with no attempt to explain or explore how and why they were amusing. There were a few attempts to use the extract and suggest the humour in that.

Question 30

Answers seemed to find difficulty in locating the precise moment and often wrote about parties in general, with little success in finding a voice for the character. There were some attempts which showed some grasp of events, although seldom was Nancy's shyness conveyed. Instead, she was often portrayed as something of an envious man-hunter.

SUSAN HILL: *I'm the King of the Castle*

Question 31

Most candidates were able to discuss Kingshaw's feeling of having escaped, and signs that he had not and generally they were keen to point out the relative tranquillity of the relationship between Kingshaw and Hooper in this section. They were alive to the contrast with their relationship at Warings. Better answers explored the language, and there were some detailed examples of analysis which showed sensitivity to the symbolism. In weaker answers there was too much narration of the story and too little attention to the important term in the question: 'powerfully conveys'.

Question 32

Answers sometimes offered some relevant textual detail, showing how Mr Hooper treated Kingshaw, and made comments about how he did not understand his own son. There was often quite a lot of assertion made without sufficient arguing of the point in hand. Better candidates were able to offer a wider range of relevant reference and offered more fully developed responses.

Question 33

Candidates generally caught the moment well, and imagined plausible thoughts in a suitable voice. There was often a sound enough general nastiness in the voice of Hooper and some villainous threats of how he planned to follow and to terrorise Kingshaw, but closer detail would have made some answers much more impressive, and helped to develop the voice still further.

From Stories of Ourselves

Question 34

The Rain Horse was frequently attempted and there were some good responses. These were characterised by close inspection of the passage and good, clear analysis of the writer's use of language. Better answers were able to link the weather with the incident to good effect, and were able to make clear the man's vulnerability. There were some very useful responses to the descriptions of the horse which create a surreal effect. Most answers, even weaker ones, made some relevant observations in connection with the question here, and there was a strong sense of engagement with the strangeness of this powerful moment in the story. Weaker responses sometimes appeared to have approached the extract as an 'unseen', showing only limited understanding of events and their significance.

Question 35

Sandpiper was the most frequently chosen of the stories and there were some very good answers which went beyond itemising the ways in which the narrator feels alienated, to consider the imagery and symbolism of the story, for example the white wall and the sand and the sea. Responses on *At Hiruharama* seldom moved beyond mere narration, with at best a brief comment about remoteness. A minority of candidates ignored the 'either/or' of the question and wrote about both texts, which was inevitably self-penalising.

Question 36

Even more than with *Sampath* (question 27), responses to this empathic question were weakened by the candidates' tendency to express what they thought Randolph ought to be thinking rather than what he would most probably think. Consequently, there were many Randolphs wracked with grief and remorse. Better answers achieved a suitably pompous voice in which to convey the snobbishness and nastiness of the character. At times, Randolph was portrayed as just abusive and there was insufficient detail included from the text to make it anything but a very nasty, hateful child cursing his dead mother. At the opposite end of the spectrum there were some responses which seemed to show some love and remorse at his treatment of his mother when she was alive, though the textual evidence for this approach is not readily available and none was ever offered. Better answers were able to produce a good deal of reference to the concerns of the text and reveal a snobbish, domineering and unpleasant man who has had and still has no time whatsoever for his ignorant and common mother. In these answers, the arrogance and snobbishness of Randolph's tone were well captured, often skilfully using textual echo, and thus made for a powerful response to character and moment.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 2010/13

Paper 13

Key Messages

For success in this examination, candidates need to:

- Demonstrate a detailed knowledge of the texts they have studied
- Read the question carefully and ensure that they are answering it
- Present a well-structured and developed argument
- Provide detailed support from the text
- Demonstrate an understanding of how writers achieve their effects

General Comments

It was evident that candidates had enjoyed studying their chosen texts. As usual, there was a wide range of achievement to be found, with some strong individual performances. However, many candidates did not use their knowledge of the texts to best effect for a number of reasons.

One of the main reasons was a failure to answer the question. Many candidates showed a good knowledge of the texts they had studied, but did not adapt that knowledge to address the particular terms of the question. Key words such as ‘entertaining’, ‘shocking’, ‘surprising’ are used in questions to provide a prompt to candidates to form the basis of an argument. Words such as ‘how’, ‘to what extent’, ‘explore’ are used to encourage candidates to analyse and evaluate. Those who take account of this tend to score more highly than those who re-tell the story. Centres are reminded that in the Band Descriptors Table, relevance becomes a consideration at band 6: in other words, candidates who simply offer an undirected narrative response will achieve at best band 7 marks. This was the case with a significant number of candidates this session that clearly had a secure knowledge of their texts, but did not shape that knowledge to form an effective answer to the question.

More candidates were presenting organised responses with an introduction and a conclusion. Candidates who do this improve their prospect of achieving a reasonable mark. A few minutes spent planning a response is time well spent. Candidates who identify the key words of a question and use them to organise their own writing generally produce more effective work.

Candidates attempting to answer extract-based questions sometimes did themselves a disservice by failing to concentrate on the set extract. Effective answers to this sort of question need to look closely at the details of the writing in the extract. Some candidates spent too long establishing the context of the extract, often leaving themselves little or no time to look at the content. This inevitably limited the scope of the candidate to respond to the way the writer uses language, one of the key descriptors for answers at band 4 or higher. It is important to consider the whole extract – many responses dealt only with part (usually the first part) of their chosen extract, inevitably limiting the range of their answer.

Although rubric infringements are less frequent than they have been in previous sessions, there were still many, usually choosing to answer on only two texts or exceeding the stipulated number of questions.

As usual, a number of candidates attempted to answer the discursive (dagger) question using the extract set in the preceding question. Although on occasions there may be relevant material in the extract, such an approach inevitably restricts the range of responses and usually leads candidates to irrelevance.

Empathic questions were popular, but candidates who opted to attempt them needed to be particularly careful to ensure that they identified the precise moment in the question, and that they were writing in the ‘voice’ of the specified character. Centres are reminded that this is the last session in which this option was available to examination candidates.

Comments on Specific Questions

SECTION A: DRAMA

ARTHUR MILLER: All My Sons

Question 1

Candidates tended to focus on George in particular, and wrote about his interaction with Chris. Textual evidence was plentiful, and candidates made constructive use of the stage directions to demonstrate some understanding of the play as drama.

Questions 2 and 3

Too few answers were seen to make comment appropriate.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: Julius Caesar

Question 4

Candidates were often successful in writing about the kindness and loving relationship between Brutus and Portia. Responses were often engaged and positive, and Portia's role was well understood, often supported by reference to elsewhere in the play. Weaker answers did not focus on the details of the writing. There was clear evidence that candidates enjoyed both text and question.

Question 5

Relatively few candidates chose this question. Those who did showed sound knowledge of the play.

Question 6

The few candidates who opted for this showed an often weak grasp of the context. Some of the responses were rather over-reliant on expressions of grief at the death of Caesar at the expense of some of the other aspects of the passage.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: The Tempest

Question 7

Answers generally showed good knowledge and understanding of the lovers' young love. The dramatic and satisfying qualities of the moment were often well addressed, with good knowledge of the testing of Ferdinand and his vow of pre-marital chastity. Prospero was seen as a strong father-figure, though few commented on why he had arranged this scene. The best answers explored the language of the extract in some depth.

Question 8

Candidates were often successful in communicating amusement at the antics of the two characters, sometimes pointing up a parallel with Antonio and Sebastian. Less successful answers spent too much time giving accounts of the parts played by the two, with little attempt to deal with the 'how' of the question.

Question 9

This was unevenly handled. Candidates tended to rely on accounts of Gonzalo's role when Prospero was exiled, with relatively little attention to what he did during the sojourn on the island. Most appreciated his generally benign aspect, although weaker answers did not achieve a convincing voice.

OSCAR WILDE: *The Importance of Being Earnest*.

Question 10

Candidates found difficulty in moving beyond an account of events in the extract to demonstrate how Wilde engages the interest of the audience. There was little real engagement with the language of the extract.

Question 11

Too few answers to provide meaningful comment.

Question 12

Those who attempted this showed at least some understanding of the character, often employing echoes of the text in capturing a voice which demonstrated some of Cecily's youthful exuberance.

SECTION B: POETRY

THOMAS HARDY: *Selected Poems*

Question 13

Some good answers engaged with the imagery of the poem, commenting on the lack of colour, leaves and the winter pond. 'Disappointment' was addressed, although candidates were frequently led into overlong speculation about a broken love-affair and, sometimes, a good deal of biographical material which contributed little to the answer.

Questions 14 and 15

Too few answers to provide meaningful comment.

SONGS OF OURSELVES: from Part 4

Question 16

Answers showed detailed background knowledge of the subject matter. In less successful answers, this knowledge was not related to the requirements of the question with its reference to 'modern life'. There were plenty of suitable textual references, but these often lacked development, although there was evidence of an attempt to look at the language of the poem in some answers.

Question 17

Answers found difficulty in identifying a particular moment, generally providing a simple commentary on the poem rather than answering the question.

Question 18

The majority of the responses to this question wrote about *Hunting Snake*, showing some understanding of the poem, but usually writing about how the speaker was surprised, rather than the reader.

SECTION C: PROSE

TSITSI DANGAREMBGA: *Nervous Conditions*

Question 19

Candidates who attempted this question were usually able to offer some evidence of why this moment is amusing and satisfying, identifying Jeremiah's behaviour as evidence of the first, and Tambo's hope that her ambitions would be realised as evidence of the second. There was clear understanding of the surface meaning of the text in many answers, though few dealt with the wider implications of the extract, or really probed its language.

Question 20

Candidates who attempted this generally wrote about how their chosen character – usually Nyasha or Lucia, although sometimes Tambu – was rebellious, without really addressing the ‘memorably’ of the question. In consequence, there was a tendency to offer a narrative response which did not explore wider implications.

Question 21

Too few responses seem to make meaningful comment.

ANITA DESAI: Fasting, Feasting

Question 22

Answers to this question were weak, focusing in general terms on Mamapapa’s relationship with Arun with very little, if any, focus on the extract.

Question 23

The few candidates who attempted this wrote largely narrative responses to events in the second part of the novel. Responses generally lacked detail.

Question 24

Although some good answers successfully recognised and captured Uma’s jealousy and resignation, most showed a basic understanding of Uma’s situation without really finding her voice.

KIRAN DESAI: Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard

Question 25

There were some entertaining and enjoyable responses, which picked out the key parts of the passage that were amusing. Nearly all candidates commented appropriately on the poor CMO, and drew out details from the passage such as the ‘missile’, his special tea, the irony of his own health when he was supposed to be in charge of the health of the district. Nearly all candidates commented on the ‘horrible, horrible onion juice’, and expressed sympathy for the CMO.

Question 26

Responses were able to explain some characteristics of Pinky and Sampath, but few of these responded to the ‘clash’ between their personalities. There was a tendency for candidates to write two character studies and then to comment on their differences. The very best responses explored their amusing clashes, citing, for example, the bicycle run, Sampath’s disrobing at the wedding and their experiences with monkeys.

Question 27

There were a few competent responses, most of which were able to connect with Mr Chawla’s despair at his son’s behaviour.

GEORGE ELIOT: Silas Marner

Question 28

Candidates showed a basic understanding of the extract, and the reason for Dolly’s visit. ‘Moving’ was seldom well handled, and there was widespread confusion about the letters on the loaves.

Question 29

Answers to this question achieved moderate success, dealing particularly with Nancy’s feelings about Eppie, although the earlier part of the novel where she reveals her thoughts about Godfrey was rarely mentioned.

Question 3

Most answers were weak to middling, showing a basic understanding of the character and events, mainly restricted to curiosity about Lantern Yard and empathy for Silas.

SUSAN HILL: I'm the King of the Castle

Question 31

This extract question was often competently done, with some well-chosen evidence from the text in support of points made. There was a tendency to subsume comments about the individuals into discussion of their relationship, but many were able to write quite thoughtfully, particularly about Edmund's hostile indifference and Mr Hooper's attempts at self-justification.

Question 32

Too few answers seen to make meaningful comment.

Question 33

There were some convincing responses to this empathic question, appreciating Mrs Kingshaw's desire for security and her pragmatic acceptance of Mr Hooper in order to achieve this. Some went beyond this, portraying her as a gold-digger in search of wealth and extravagant self-gratification. Nearly all captured her capacity for self-delusion about her son's likely reaction to the new situation.

From STORIES OF OURSELVES

Question 34

Most answers were weak to middling, showing knowledge of the story by means of narration. There was some attempt to deal with the matter of the effective ending, although few moved beyond asserting that it was. Some more sophisticated responses claimed that the lorry driver made the ending effective by widening the theme to more general post-war society, reinforced by echoing the words that is was not personal. Few explored the description of the actual destruction.

Question 35

Most candidates understood how the father was unpleasant, and many were aware of the difficult father-son relationship, but textual detail was frequently lacking, and answers rarely moved far beyond narration.

Question 36

Most answers were weak and did not find a suitable voice for Mr Donaldson. They showed a weak grasp of the story and little understanding of the humour.