LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 2010/12
Poetry and Prose 12

Key messages

In successful responses, candidates:

- address the key words of the question
- write relevant personal responses informed by their detailed knowledge of the text
- support their responses with well-selected supporting references
- explore sensitively and in detail ways in which writers achieve their effects.

In less successful responses, candidates:

- refer in general terms to 'themes' they have studied without focusing on the key words of the question
- show only a basic grasp of surface meanings and are overly dependent on explanation and assertion
- use long quotations or a list of shorter quotations without comment on specific words
- log writing devices without exploring the effects created, particularly in poetry responses
- made general comments in their closing paragraph about a text's 'relatability' in ways that detract from their response either to the question or text.

General comments

There was some evidence of assured work this session especially in relation to ***Section A***, where the most successful candidates showed some insight and individuality in their responses to poetry questions. Most candidates were familiar with the layout of the paper, though there were examples of candidates answering several questions rather than two. Most candidates wrote in legible handwriting; this is essential in communicating their ideas clearly to Examiners, and it is important that teachers remind candidates about this.

The strongest responses showed the ability of candidates to select relevant material for the question that had been set. This is an essential requirement of the examination: questions should not be seen as mere prompts for candidates to unload all their knowledge about the poem or character or theme or setting mentioned in a question. The strongest responses to poetry and passage-based questions showed that candidates selected their material carefully whereas in less effective responses candidates wrote exhaustively as they worked their way through a poem or prose extract in an explanatory manner, losing focus on the question.

Successful answers began by engaging with the key words of the question. As observed in previous reports, this is a sensible strategy when writing an examination answer in 45 minutes. Some candidates wrote a brief plan before starting their answer, and this often led to a more effectively organised response. There were, however, many candidates this session who pursued strategies that were less effective. These included the writing of lengthy introductions that focused on biographical information about the writer and/or that offered a random list of devices used by the writer. In some responses, candidates were determined to work their way through 'themes', sometimes alluding to several themes within one paragraph, ignoring the specific demands of the question. The idea that listing key themes, regardless of the question, will lead to high reward is based on a misguided assumption; it is important that teachers remind candidates of this.

The most convincing personal responses embedded concise textual references to support the points being made. Those candidates who had learned a range of direct quotations to use in answering the prose general essay questions performed more strongly than those who had insufficient textual detail upon which to draw and who had, therefore, to rely on general assertions.

© 2024

The most successful responses showed sustained critical analysis of ways in which writers use form, structure and language to convey their ideas. Less successful responses, particularly to poetry, simply logged devices without close analysis of *precise* ways in which writers use them to create *specific* effects. Once again, this session, the most assertive and least effective comments related to enjambment and caesura, often with broad comments made about an increase in, or slowing down of, the pace of a poem. There was an increase in candidates making simple and unproductive statements about rhyme schemes (e.g. 'ABBACC'); regular rhyme schemes were variously claimed to show the regularity of a person's life, the happiness of their character or the intensity of their grief. Such comments rarely rose above the level of basic generalisation and were not rooted in the specific detail of the text.

Some candidates referred candidates to line numbers in poems and extracts without quoting the actual words they intended to support a point they were making. Some candidates used ellipses to shorten quotations but in a way that omitted the key words that would support the point being made. Candidates should be taught how to integrate concise supporting quotations into their response.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

The most successful responses offered detailed analysis of Auden's use of words and images at various stages in the poem. Most commented on the use of imperatives, for example, in the first stanza, to 'stop' time, noise and communication in preparation for the funeral. The dominant use of commands later in the poem were also explored: 'put out'; 'pack up'; pour away'; 'sweep up'. Most commented on the use of personification in 'moaning' and 'scribbling'. Less successful responses worked their way through the poem, explaining rather than analysing or simply listing various themes they had studied without relating their comments to the key words in the question.

Question 2

The most successful responses focused on the key words 'such an intriguing poem', with many questioning the motives of the caller inviting the receiver of the call to express their feelings and wishing them 'a nice day' at the end of the poem. There was much evidence of analysis of the voice and tone of the caller and of the exaggerated language used to describe the prize: 'Ultra-super Global Special' and 'retrospective Chances Module'. Most candidates grasped the idea of a prank or trick call, with some commenting on the cruelty of the caller. Less successful responses re-told the story of the poem without focusing on either the question or analysing the ways in which Adcock achieves her effects.

Question 3

Most candidates commented on the speaker's loneliness and linked this to the question's key words 'such a sad poem'. They commented on his poor health and how he regards himself as a failure compared with others. The most successful responses were able to support their ideas with specific details from the text, leading to a close analysis of the conversational and self-pitying tone of the speaker. Less successful responses showed evidence of not having read the poem with sufficient care. Some candidates offered a stanza-by-stanza description of the poem, overly dependent on assertion rather than close analysis of ways in which Shelley makes the poem so sad. There was also much unproductive labelling of the rhyme scheme.

Question 4

The most successful responses explored ideas about truth and honesty, self-control, lack of envy, having a good conscience and a belief in God. They also commented on the speaker's innocent pursuits of reading and associating with friends. These responses were able to explore relevant aspects of language and structure, for example, the religious diction and the poem's list-like structure. Whereas these responses tailored their material to the focus of the question ('ways in which Wotton strikingly conveys his thoughts and feelings'), less successful responses paraphrased the content of the poem without close analysis of effects. Examiners commented that some responses included significant misreading.

© 2024

Question 5

Most candidates understood what the relic is and that it is washed up by the tide. There was at least some understanding that the sea has no regard for living things. Only the strongest responses were able to explore the irony of the jaws being eaten, the imagery of death and violence, and the darkness of tone and atmosphere. In these responses, there was a generally clear focus on the key words 'intriguing poem'. Less successful responses picked out words and phrases and commented on them, often in an overly assertive way without addressing the question.

Question 6

This was the more popular of the two questions on Hughes's poetry. Most candidates acknowledged that the poem is a monologue by the hawk, an omnipotent God-like figure asserting himself over nature. He was regarded as an 'apex' predator who is very powerful and single-minded. The most successful responses explored the ways in which Hughes conveys the hawk's arrogance about its right to kill and its complete sense of entitlement. These responses explored the sustained first-person perspective, the violence of the imagery and the language of dominance conveyed in short, assertive sentences. Less successful responses paraphrased the poem's content or made simple generalisations about enjambment and caesura without specific examples or analysis.

Section B

Question 7

Most candidates were able to contrast Eugene's violence and proclivity to abuse in the family home with his professed faith in Christianity. They observed that the passage marks a pivotal moment in the novel when Jaja's defiance leads to a more independent mindset. The most successful responses commented on the physical appearance of Papa and the deliberate and sinister quietness of his voice showing his intention of intimidating Jaja; they explored too the effect of Jaja's deliberately confrontational statements and the symbolism of the smashed figurines. These responses were able to contextualise this moment within the wider novel. Less successful responses worked through the passage describing the tension without exploring the detail of how Adichie makes the moment so dramatic and significant.

Question 8

Candidates generally were able to identify key ideas about the characters' different attitudes towards their father, religion and disciplining their children. Most contrasted Eugene's wealth and Ifeoma's relatively poor living conditions. There was also comment on Eugene's strict observance of religion compared with Ifeoma's more easy-going attitude, and the contrast in the children's reactions to their parents, shown in the fear of Eugene and affection for Ifeoma. The most successful responses were able to recall a wide range of apt quotations to support their ideas and use them as a means of analysing closely Adichie's use of language. Many candidates who did not have such recall of textual detail were less able to explore qualities of the writing and relied on overly assertive answers.

Question 9

Most responses showed an understanding of the moment in the passage and awareness of its position within the wider novel. They grasped the fact that Pip rescues Miss Havisham without regard to his own safety and understood Miss Havisham's regret and desperate plea to be forgiven. The most successful responses pursued the idea that Pip's selflessness involved assisting a woman who had done him much harm and explored the ways in which Dickens conveys Miss Havisham's shrieking, the later 'terrible vivacity' of her voice and the significance of Pip's kiss. Less successful responses worked through the passage describing events rather than analysing specific textual detail.

Question 10

The most successful responses considered both the imbalance of power within the relationship and the comic dimension of the relationship early in the novel. Most candidates were able to pick out details from the text showing Mrs Joe's harsh treatment of Joe, her belittling him and physically attacking him with the Tickler. Many pointed to Joe's admirable loyalty to his invalid wife later in the novel and to the oddness of the relationship. The strongest responses included a range of direct quotations which candidates used to support their ideas and to explore Dickens's use of language. Those without such detail fared less well,

© 2024

having to rely on general references and overly assertive comments. Some candidates were distracted away from the question into commentary on Pip's relationship with Joe and Mrs Joe.

Question 11

The most successful responses explored revealing details in the passage, such as the narrator's monosyllabic replies, Mrs Danvers' body language and Favell's boldness and sense of entitlement. These responses commented on the use of first-person narration and the deeper implications of this moment. The strongest responses explored the unsettling aspects of the relationship between Danvers and Favell, with hints at complicity revealed in the flashed look of warning and his winking at Danvers. Less successful responses worked through the passage, often merely re-telling the story and not addressing the focus of the question. Some responses were more intent on listing relevant themes of the novel rather than exploring the detail of the passage and addressing the question. A few candidates did not know who Favell is.

Question 12

There were too few responses to make meaningful comment.

Question 13

Most candidates showed some understanding of this moment's position within the wider novel and recognised Ashima's severe distress in being without family or support. The most successful responses commented that, whereas Ashoke is eager to be supportive, he is nonetheless the one who had left the dirty dishes for his wife to come home to. These responses recognised in his dismissal of Ashima's concerns his own desire for them to stay in America. Some less successful responses referred to themes such as clash of cultures, integration and isolation though without relating their ideas to the question's key words 'such a powerful moment'. Less successful responses offered narrative and overly assertive approaches, with a few candidates showing insufficient engagement with the detail of the extract. A few candidates wrote about the novel as a whole and ignored the extract.

Question 14

There were too few responses to make meaningful comment.

Question 15

Most candidates showed at least some understanding of the moment: the repercussions of the picnic, the headmistress creeping around in the middle of the night, and her memory of her last conversation with Sara. The strongest responses commented on the description of Mrs Appleyard's true appearance as 'an old woman' beneath 'her battledress of steel and whalebone' and on the flashback to her vision of Sara and her awful cries. These candidates commented on the immediate context of Mrs Appleyard having just murdered Sara and disposed of her body. Less successful responses often lacked a secure understanding of events in this and recent moments of the novel. In these responses, candidates tended to describe the content rather than analyse closely ways in which Lindsay makes this such an unsettling and significant moment.

Question 16

There were too few responses to make meaningful comment.

Question 17

There was general understanding that Pi is facing the reality of sharing a lifeboat with a tiger as he imagines ways in which Richard Parker can easily kill him. The most successful responses focused on 'vivid impressions of Pi's state of mind' and explored the effects of the rhetorical questions that emphasise his hopeless plight and the repetition of 'we fight' to show his determination. Many candidates noted the graphic descriptions of Richard Parker's paws and fangs that hinted at Pi's possible fate. Less successful responses needed to develop their ideas in more detail to address the focus of the question and to make greater use of detail from the text to support their ideas. The weakest responses simply described the content of the passage.

Question 18

There were too few responses to make meaningful comment.

© 2024

Question 19

For the few responses seen, candidates showed at least some understanding of the passage and its position within the wider novel. Approaches tended to be descriptive rather than closely analytical. The relatively stronger responses were able to explore ways in which Wells conveys a sense of panic and attempts to escape from 'the world gone mad'. Some candidates commented on the contrast between the balmy and peaceful evening and the frenzy of the following day, referring to the sounds described ('clamour of bells', 'running in the street', 'drumming and trumpeting').

Question 20

There were too few responses to make meaningful comment.

Question 21

Most responses showed an awareness of the setting of the family gathered for the reading of their father's will and of the children's mistaken assumption that they will have to 'do something' about their mother. The stronger responses explored the lack of affection within the family and the superficial expressions of the children's concern for their mother. The most successful responses selected relevant material from the extract and other parts of the story to address the question's key words 'revealing' and 'significant'. These responses explored aspects of language, structure and narrative viewpoint. Less successful responses re-told the story without focusing on the question. Examiners reported that some candidates had an insecure grasp of key details about both the mother and the will.

Question 22

Most candidates showed at least some general understanding of the character and relevant events in the story. They observed that the boy accepts Mrs Jones's kind but rough treatment of him and that he comes from a deprived background. There was little evidence of close analysis of the detail in the story which made it difficult for candidates to address the question: 'Explore the ways in which Hughes vividly portrays…' Without a sufficient range of detail, candidate responses often did not move beyond a descriptive approach. This set text comprises ten stories from *Stories of Ourselves: Volume 2*; candidates need to have a detailed knowledge of the stories (including direct references) if they are to achieve the higher levels of the mark scheme.

© 2024

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 2010/13
Poetry and Prose 13

Key messages

In successful responses, candidates:

- address the key words of the question
- write relevant personal responses informed by their detailed knowledge of the text
- support their responses with well-selected supporting references
- explore sensitively and in detail ways in which writers achieve their effects.

In less successful responses, candidates:

- refer in general terms to 'themes' they have studied without focusing on the key words of the question
- show only a basic grasp of surface meanings and are overly dependent on explanation and assertion
- use long quotations or a list of shorter quotations without comment on specific words
- log writing devices without exploring the effects created, particularly in poetry responses
- made general comments in their closing paragraph about a text's 'relatability' in ways that detract from their response either to the question or text.

General comments

There was some evidence of assured work this session especially in relation to ***Section A***, where the most successful candidates showed some insight and individuality in their responses to poetry questions. Most candidates were familiar with the layout of the paper, though there were examples of candidates answering several questions rather than two. Most candidates wrote in legible handwriting; this is essential in communicating their ideas clearly to Examiners, and it is important that teachers remind candidates about this.

The strongest responses showed the ability of candidates to select relevant material for the question that had been set. This is an essential requirement of the examination: questions should not be seen as mere prompts for candidates to unload all their knowledge about the poem or character or theme or setting mentioned in a question. The strongest responses to poetry and passage-based questions showed that candidates selected their material carefully whereas in less effective responses candidates wrote exhaustively as they worked their way through a poem or prose extract in an explanatory manner, losing focus on the question.

Successful answers began by engaging with the key words of the question. As observed in previous reports, this is a sensible strategy when writing an examination answer in 45 minutes. Some candidates wrote a brief plan before starting their answer, and this often led to a more effectively organised response. There were, however, many candidates this session who pursued strategies that were less effective. These included the writing of lengthy introductions that focused on biographical information about the writer and/or that offered a random list of devices used by the writer. In some responses, candidates were determined to work their way through 'themes', sometimes alluding to several themes within one paragraph, ignoring the specific demands of the question. The idea that listing key themes, regardless of the question, will lead to high reward is based on a misguided assumption; it is important that teachers remind candidates of this.

The most convincing personal responses embedded concise textual references to support the points being made. Those candidates who had learned a range of direct quotations to use in answering the prose general essay questions performed more strongly than those who had insufficient textual detail upon which to draw and who had, therefore, to rely on general assertions.

© 2024

The most successful responses showed sustained critical analysis of ways in which writers use form, structure and language to convey their ideas. Less successful responses, particularly to poetry, simply logged devices without close analysis of *precise* ways in which writers use them to create *specific* effects. Once again, this session, the most assertive and least effective comments related to enjambment and caesura, often with broad comments made about an increase in, or slowing down of, the pace of a poem. There was an increase in candidates making simple and unproductive statements about rhyme schemes (e.g. 'ABBACC'); regular rhyme schemes were variously claimed to show the regularity of a person's life, the happiness of their character or the intensity of their grief. Such comments rarely rose above the level of basic generalisation and were not rooted in the specific detail of the text.

Some candidates referred to line numbers in poems and extracts without quoting the actual words they intended to support a point they were making. Some candidates used ellipses to shorten quotations but in a way that omitted the key words that would support the point being made. Candidates should be taught how to integrate concise supporting quotations into their response.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

Many candidates took a philosophical approach to this poem and considered the contrast between the sudden death of the fly and the unexpected nature of death for humans. Many commented on the beauty of the fly compared to the normal negative perceptions of flies as conveyors of dirt and disease. Stronger answers engaged well with the link of the death of the fly and human mortality and evaluated language features such as the metaphor of the book, the imagery of the wings or the exaggerated positive description of the fly. Less successful responses tended to repeat their ideas about death and could have explored a wider range of features in the poem.

Question 2

Candidates were generally well informed and considered the ways the poem was powerful such as the determined, relentless and sinister nature of the planners. There was an understanding of how the planners are deliberately manipulating the public into accepting their ideas. Stronger answers effectively analyzed a range of the writing features such as the dental and mathematical imagery, the images of, 'anesthesia, amnesia, hypnosis', the personification of the sea and skies or the alliteration and oxymorons: 'grace of mathematics', 'dental dexterity', 'history is new again'. Some sensitively commented on the disappointment of the poet and the Singaporean people at the loss of their cultural history. Less successful answers noted writing features without deeper analysis. A few were sidetracked into writing about the environmental issues raised by the planners' constructions.

Question 3

Most candidates understood the endless search of the poet for an elusive lover. Stronger answers engaged with the language, for example, the symbolism of the physical hunt or the presence of the woman in the surroundings. These answers focused on the key word, 'intriguing', providing relevant textual support. Less successful answers were tempted to speculate on what had inspired the poem, which resulted in some assertions. Some commented on the poem at a literal level only.

Question 4

There were too few responses to make meaningful comment.

Question 5

Many candidates understood that the fox represented the writer's emerging thoughts and the process of creative inspiration. Candidates generally noted the context of the dark, lonely night in which the writer was struggling for inspiration. What differentiated candidates was the degree and quality of analysis. The strongest answers commented on the movements of the fox and linked these to the creative process and explained why this was 'fascinating'. These candidates appreciated literary features such as the clock's loneliness, or the empty sky and explored what these features might mean. Stronger candidates commented on the last lines of the poem and how the ending was different to the beginning. Less successful answers

© 2024

tended to log features without explanation and did not respond to the key word. A few discussed the fox as a real animal, without linking it to the emerging thoughts of the writer.

Question 6

Most candidates showed some understanding of the concept of nature and beauty in the poem and the contrasting ideas of urban and rural life. Stronger answers understood the magnificence and unchanging nature of the horses and they noted that the encounter was an exceptional, disturbing experience. These answers engaged deeply with language features such the descriptions of the cold dawn or the violence of the sunrise. They noted the contrast between the stillness of the horses and the typical movement in nature. Less successful answers offered more literal readings, and some did not mention the horses at all.

Question 7

Candidates focused on the physical responses of Kambili's fear: her stomach, her breathing and attempts to eat. Many commented on the unfairness of being punished for coming second. Successful answers appreciated Kambili's viewpoint and the suspense of waiting for Papa to open the envelope. They noted the detailed description of Papa's room as a haven of comfort and plushness contrasted with the abuse of Papa. Less successful answers tended to focus on Eugene and presented a character sketch. Some candidates spent too much time discussing the effects of colonialism and religion without pinpointing how these impacted the question.

Question 8

The few that responded to this question showed an understanding of Amaka's character. Stronger answers recognised her as a positive female role model for Kambili. They noted that she was larger than life and quick witted in comparison with her more repressed cousins. They commented on her negative traits such as her spitefulness at times towards Kambili. Less successful answers presented a straightforward character sketch with little analysis.

Question 9

Most candidates showed an understanding of both characters, picking up on Pip's ambitions to become a gentleman and his feelings for Estella, and Biddy's common-sense attitude. Stronger answers understood that Pip's comments were thoughtless and insulting to Biddy in contrast to her replies which were kind and even gently sarcastic. They commented on Biddy's patience with Pip, her desire not to hurt his feelings and how she was concerned that Pip's aspirations would lead to disappointment. Stronger answers picked up on the deeper implications of Pip's plucking and throwing away the grass and emphasized the contrasts between the way Biddy and Pip speak of themselves. Less successful answers worked through the passage without delving into deeper meaning or noting the subtle but gentle sarcasm of Biddy's replies.

Question 10

The few candidates that selected this question presented relevant arguments to support their answers. Candidates viewed Miss Havisham sympathetically, exploring her sad back story and breakdown but also commented on the negative aspects of her long-term manipulation of Estella and Pip. Her final hope to atone and be forgiven was commented on. Candidates showed understanding beyond the bare bones of the story and appreciated some of the writing features such as the descriptions of the rooms or the significance of the fire.

Question 11

Most candidates understood how the passage is 'frightening' and picked up on points such as the naivety and innocence of the narrator or the sinister manipulation of Mrs Danvers. Many noted Mrs Danvers' obsession with Rebecca. Stronger answers commented on the horror of the narrator considering jumping to escape the feelings of inadequacy. They appreciated the literary features in the passage such as the gothic elements, the physical sensations such as the 'damp and clammy' atmosphere, 'the white mist' or the increasingly urgent commands from Mrs Danvers 'to jump'. Less successful answers tended to track through the extract and sometimes went off onto a character sketch of Mrs Danvers. Some responses did not explore the passage deeply enough and missed opportunities to explore literary features.

© 2024

Question 12

There were too few responses to make meaningful comment.

Question 13

Many candidates considered why the passage is disturbing and noted points such as Moushumi's unhappiness with the evening, the unwelcoming atmosphere in the restaurant or Gogol's lack of awareness. Stronger answers explored the clues to the relationship between Gogol and Moushumi linking points to the marriage breakdown. They commented on the detailed description of the restaurant and appreciated how the language reflects the mood. They noted Moushumi's thoughts and feelings, explaining how these linked to events later in the novel. Less successful answers fell into retelling the passage, often with a lot of quotation, but no analysis of how the passage presented the experience. A few answers revealed limited knowledge of the text overall. A few candidates interpreted the passage as a commentary on race relations.

Question 14

The few candidates who selected this question generally understood Gogol's attempts to distance himself from his past and commented on points such as his relationship with Maxine's family, his name changes and his changed attitude towards the end of the novel. Successful answers included a range of relevant supporting details. Some less successful answers showed only a basic understanding of the text and were limited in their supporting evidence.

Question 15

Many candidates struggled to pin down the 'moment' although they were aware of the events in the extract. They noted the introductory setting, the contents of the letter to Dianne, the arrival of Irma and the disturbing letter from Leopold. The strongest answers managed to link the events in the extract together and explored aspects such as the relationship between Irma and Dora, the atmosphere of the college or the significance of the demanding letter from Mr Leopold. Less successful answers tended to retell what happened in the extract. Some of these responses listed pre-learned themes, for example, colonialism, nature and exploitation, and tried to use these to answer the question. This resulted in random, unconnected sentences to fit pre-learned ideas at the expense of addressing the question.

Question 16

Although only a few candidates chose this question, most answers were personal and thoughtful with evidence of thorough preparation. Strongest answers considered the question and provided detailed points to support their argument, for example, that Mrs Appleyard's death was a suitable ending for her, that Albert was justly rewarded, and that Mike has followed his heart.

Question 17

Most candidates understood the serious physical and emotional condition Pi and Richard Parker were in, and Pi's realization that death was near. Stronger answers explored the implications of the diary entries and the refreshing effect of the rain. They commented on the impact of the final lines, in which the 'pens ran out', not the paper. Some of these considered the close bond that had developed between Pi and Richard Parker and commented specifically on Pi's care for Richard Parker and the wonder of being able to touch him for 'the first time ever'. Less successful answers tended to retell the events in the passage and did not consider the question.

Question 18

There were too few responses to make meaningful comment.

Question 19

Most candidates showed some understanding of the violence in the passage although did not always link this to the question's key word 'dramatic'. Stronger answers understood the ruthlessness and anarchy of what happens after the Martian invasion and commented on the drama of the screaming and fighting and the appearance of a revolver. They explained the reasons for the violence, the breakdown in society and the implications of these. They understood that the drama came from the potential violence of the attack and its impact. Less successful answers picked out a few details from the passage though did not respond to the

© 2024

key word ‘dramatic’ and sometimes lapsed into retelling the events. Some attempted unsuccessfully to include pre-learnt ideas about Social Darwinism or colonialism and empire though without tailoring their material to the demands of the question.

Question 20

There were too few responses to make meaningful comment.

Question 21

Most candidates understood that the passage is about the young man’s desperate search for his lost love. Many commented on the landlady who was seen as a malevolent character, happy to lie to the young man rather than accept any responsibility. The most successful answers evaluated the details of the setting, picking up on the unpleasant language used to describe the city, for example, the general wetness of the atmosphere, suggestive of decay and death. They also explored the language used to describe the land lady (‘her throat seemed lined with fur’) and the disgusting house with hints of evil in the references to imps and devils. These answers selected relevant points from the passage to consider the key word ‘intriguing’. Less successful answers tended to describe the contents of the passage rather than closely analyze the text or select points to answer the question. Some candidates spent too long on the homeless at the start of the passage. Examiners reported that some candidates did not seem to understand key elements of the story.

Question 22

There were too few responses to make meaningful comment.

© 2024

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 2010/22
Drama 22

Key messages

- Teachers should refer to the Syllabus during the planning stages of the course for set text requirements to avoid creating a rubric infringement on Paper 2 Drama.
- The most successful responses addressed the key terms of the question in the introductory paragraph, sustained the link, and supported ideas with concise quotations which were analysed fully.
- Beginning a response with lengthy comments on the writer's life, works and times; giving plot summaries, or listing the writer's techniques to be addressed, is an unproductive way to start an essay. Conclusions need to be more than a reiteration of points.
- In passage-based question, successful answers briefly stated the context of the passage, selecting relevant material from the whole passage and analysed both content and the writer's methods effectively.
- Successful answers to the discursive questions, maintained focus on the question and could refer to specific incidents from across the whole text.
- 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

There were some outstanding answers with a sophisticated sense of audience and a detailed exploration of effects. The majority of candidates had a sound grasp of the plots and an engagement with the characters.

The main issues in less successful answers on these texts were: the desire to spot a theme in every paragraph of the answer where this had little to do with the question; including lengthy context or background material distracting from the task, especially in the passage-based questions; a narrative or descriptive approach saying what happens (usually accurately) but without comment and analysis; applying modern idea of feminism or 'the patriarchy' to the texts written in the 16th or 17th centuries. This was sometimes done to great effect but often distracted from the task or was applied in a superficial way. There was considerable 'ploughing through' the passages line by line rather selecting judiciously the most significant elements to answer the question.

The most popular text was *Othello* followed by *A Streetcar Named Desire, A Midsummer's Night Dream* and *Crumbs from the Table of Joy*. *Death and the King's Horseman* was the least popular text. The most successful responses showed detailed appreciation of texts, and were aware of the text as performance, commenting on stagecraft, mood and tone, as well as the dramatic impact writers achieved.

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

© 2024

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

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

There were few brief responses but there was a considerable number of rubric infringements where candidates answered two questions on the same text, or answered two passage-based or two discursive questions rather than one of each. In this case, both essays were marked but only the higher mark awarded. A few candidates answered only one question.

Candidates are reminded not to refer to line numbers instead of quoting from the text and to remember to label their answers clearly with the question number at the top of the response. They should also be aware that using the passage to answer the discursive question is unlikely to contain much to reward.

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.

Centres are reminded that in 2025 the texts *Othello* and *Crumbs from the Table of Joy* will be replaced by *A Taste of Honey* by Shelagh Delaney and William Shakespeare's, *Antony and Cleopatra*.

Comments on specific questions

LYNN NOTTAGE: *Crumbs from the Table of Joy*

Question 1

(a) There were some effective responses here from candidates who appreciated how Lily's arrival shook things up in the Crump household. The best answers focused on the humour, contrasting Lily's approach to life with Godfrey's, and her effect both on him and on the girls, and the entertainment factor in Lily's forthright, bold approach. The girls' responses were considered along with wider issues such as oppression and racism, generally dealt with humorously in this passage. There were some clear evaluations of what made the passage funny.

Much was made of the embarrassment caused by Lily's teasing of Godfrey and her over-familiarity with Ernestine, and some of the most successful answers picked out and analysed the clues both to Lily not being exactly what she claims to be, and to her past history with Godfrey and how Nottage used Lily's dialogue to indicate how Godfrey had changed.

Candidates were less successful where they focused on reference to race when Lily talks about it as they found it hard to link it to the focus of the question. One problem with a significant number of responses lay in the lack of focus on what makes this moment 'entertaining'. Stage directions are also a source of entertainment - for example Ermina's reactions - though these were largely unexplored. Some candidates painted it as a scene of joyful family reunion with no understanding of the tensions or the subtext and how this made it entertaining for the audience with the hints of trouble ahead.

(b) The most successful answers used specific textual detail and a range of reference from across the text. Most understood the contrast in their characters and aspirations. However, there was often very little on the 'dramatically' of the question and sometimes nothing on the contrast, most often responses produced two character profiles of the girls.

© 2024

Successful answers commented on Ermina's feisty, social aspects as opposed to Ernestine's quieter and more studious personality. Differences in their responses to their father and Gerte were also cited. Many candidates explored the physical differences between Ernestine and Ermina and commented on their different outcomes at the end of the play. The best answers explored Ernestine's relationship with the audience and how she provides a commentary on events in the play while also noticing that Ermina initially seemed more outspoken. Better answers commented on the way in which Ernestine would address the audience and provide a commentary on events in the play.

Weaker answers misread 'compare' for 'contrast' and focused, for example, on the fact they were both coping with losing their mother, and with the day-to-day racism they were exposed to. A few answers were self-penalising as they focused solely on the passage for 1**(a)** so rarely made more than a few straightforward comments on the girls.

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

Question 2

(a) Most candidates understood the market women's adulation and fear of Elesin, with the strongest noting the irony of this in relation to his ultimate failure. Many failed, however, to recognise that his taking offence was a joke and part of his self-interested manipulation contributing to what we learn about his character here.

More successful answers showed understanding of his role and that his behaviour could stop him achieving it and that the Praise Singer and Iyaloja were warning him of this. They looked at stage effects such as the choric chanting, the repetition, the dancing but, in general, the striking dramatic effects of the scene could have been more fully explored.

Some responses failed to see how Elesin teases the women here, and is happy to increase their anxiety levels to feed his ego and his hedonistic impulses, but they did understand their genuine fear of offending him. Weaker responses, while appreciating that the women are unhappy because Elesin is unhappy, failed to explain what he is unhappy about.

(b) This question achieved a range of responses. The most successful answers explored the personalities of the two men, particularly their flaws, as well as giving an account of what their duties were, as they saw them, and the extent to which they responded to their importance. The question also provided every opportunity to talk about tradition, religion and culture in the colonial context, though the danger here was in contrasting the two world views without maintaining the focus on the two men and what they say and do.

Better answers pointed out some of the ironies in the situation: Pilkings being responsible for two deaths in trying to prevent one, and Olunde fulfilling the traditional role even after having absorbed Western culture.

There was good understanding of the conflicts involved and of the inevitability of failure for at least one of the two characters. There was less success in looking at how the importance was dramatically conveyed. Candidates tended to comment on how they failed in their duty but without fully exploring the consequences of that failure. Only a few responses selected material to focus securely on Elesin's shame and Olunde committing ritual suicide in his place; or his lost honour as a father while looking around to blame everyone else and finally confessing his own failing.

There was often very little written about Pilkings and frequent misunderstanding of his role. However, there was awareness of his duty to stop the ritual going ahead and of his determination to ensure that the Prince's visit and the ball would not be affected. There was also some good understanding of his insensitivity to Yoruban Culture. One common misconception was that Pilkings is a police officer or Chief of Police. He is a District Officer – an administrator. Another was that Yoruba is a place instead of an ethnic group/tribe.

© 2024

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: *A Streetcar Named Desire*

Question 3

(a) Successful answers understood the context of the passage. Stanley has discovered the loss of Belle Reve. Blanche, knowing he is suspicious, tries to distract him with her usual flirtatious tactics but this only drives him further away which increases her determination to make an impression on him, and his irritation with her, creating increasing tension. Many understood Stanley's anger and frustration with her tactics and his violent responses possibly foreshadowing what is to come. One strong response pointed out that Blanche does not like 'primary colours' but young, effeminate poetic men – the very antithesis of Stanley. There was some appreciation of Stella's attempt to defuse the situation and of the contrast between Blanche's manner of speaking and Stanley's more blunt responses to her.

Many responses usefully explored the violence that erupts in the slamming down of the bottle, as Blanche tries to deflect the subject of the house, noting how it foreshadows the much worse violence to come. Some candidates focused also on Blanche's motivation here, referencing her past experiences of men; better ones discussed how she might be motivated by guilt or a pathological need to be admired or validated by men; less insightful answers put her behaviour down simply to promiscuity. Stronger candidates were able to make reference to the stage directions in the extract and make valid points in connection with the question.

Weaker answers claimed that Blanche is trying to seduce Stanley or steal him from Stella giving a superficial reading of the text. There is some sexual chemistry but her fake praise of him was read on a surface level.

(b) This was a popular question with the strongest answers commenting on the stage effects such as the polka tune and blue piano music, the gun shot and the menacing shadows. Many looked effectively at the symbolism of light and the paper lantern, Blanche's excessive vanity and bathing and her desire for 'magic' over realism. The most successful answers were able to consider how her façade deteriorated and how, as this did, her mental state became more unstable.

There was much sympathy expressed for Blanche while exploring her many character flaws and weaknesses. Her lies, her pretentiousness, and her unadvised relationships with younger men were effectively discussed and illustrated. The brutal way Stanley removes her options was also well understood and how her sister chooses her husband in spite of his actions, leaving Blanche utterly exposed and driving her further into neurotic fantasy.

Some candidates focused mainly on discussing how her mental health deteriorated and how different factors played a part, for example, the suicide of her young husband. Less successful answers digressed into a narrative discussion of Blanche rather than exploring how she was a product of her environment

Less successful answers often wrote at some length about the events which had caused Blanche's disturbance rather than Williams's portrayal of it. Some knowledge was shown but narration of the plot is a low-level skill and unlikely to achieve much reward.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE*: A Midsummer's Night Dream*

Question 4

(a) The best answers were able to consider how the poor quality of the play caused the reaction in Philostrate and made some insightful comments on the role of leadership and the working classes. They commented on how the play was being described as ludicrous, as the audience knows it will be, and that Theseus generously appreciates the good intention behind it, showing his leadership qualities. They identified the fact that there were contrasts in language 'merry and tragical', 'hot ice' with some knowing the term 'oxymoron' but having identified these they did not always go on to make any point. Some understood that Philostrate was trying to advise Theseus not to watch the performance but the exchange between three relatively insignificant characters proved to be confusing for some candidates.

There was misunderstanding of '*I must confess, made mine eyes water'* with some candidates stating that this was a serious moment as it showed that Philostrate found the play so sad that it

© 2024

made him cry. Very few candidates understood the humour in Philostrate's words. There was also misunderstanding about his relationship with Theseus.

The weakest answers demonstrated little understanding of the question or text and wrote about the rude Mechanicals and about their rehearsals instead of the actual passage.

(b) This was a popular question. The most successful candidates avoided telling the story, and gave a wider range of reference than just the opening scenes of the play, supporting points with some direct and accurate textual reference. The best answers referred to Helena's '*two cherries on a stem'* speech, the insults '*painted maypole,.she was a vixen….though she be but little she is fierce'* where they mock each other's physical and personality traits, providing the richest source of evidence for the 'vivid' portrayal of the relationship. Some candidates understood the significance of the inferiority/superiority complex of Helena and Hermia. A common approach was to write a character profile of both, making links to their relationship and how it changed due to their love interests. Those who did better focused on the underlying tension inherent from the beginning.

Less successful answers did not know enough specific textual detail to support points leaving little scope for analysis and resulting in a basic retelling of the plot. Candidates need to have memorised a few select quotations to answer the discursive question successfully.

Weaker answers retold the plot and wrote generalised comments about love without much reference to the play. Common misconceptions were that Helena and Hermia were sisters and several candidates mixed up the names of the couples making their argument hard to follow.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE*: Othello*

Question 5

(a) There was a wide range of responses to this question. The strongest answers commented on audience response to elucidate the power and tragedy of the passage. They showed awareness that the dramatic irony is the key. We know Desdemona is innocent and that what she says is true so we feel both exasperation and sorrow at what is happening. The language was explored in some detail, though the power of some of the imagery at the end of the passage *'the eclipse of sun and moon'* was missed as most candidates took a linear approach to work through the passage, failing to reach the end. Dramatic moments such as Desdemona being told erroneously that Cassio is dead and Othello's misunderstanding of her response were considered, though the drama of Emilia knocking on the door was only picked up by a few. The best answers commented on the terms that showed Othello still loved Desdemona.

The symbolism of the handkerchief was well understood and the contrast between this Othello and the one we first see in the play offered strong material. Effective responses also illustrated Desdemona's confusion and panic and Othello's rage effectively. Better responses commented on the changes in Othello's speech patterns and the impact to this and his contradictory language towards Desdemona at this moment, referring to her a both '*sweet soul'* and '*strumpet*'.

Less successful answers focused too much on the context by narrating events and Iago's manipulation rather than the impact of this particular moment in the play and there was also misunderstanding and misinterpretation. Some candidates lost their focus on the extract and wrote extensively about the handkerchief, its origins and what happened to it thinking that Othello killed her with the handkerchief. Candidates thought that Cassio was dead, that Desdemona had given him the handkerchief and that Othello's ' *I have no wife'* speech meant he was pleased with what he had done. Others thought that Emilia comes into the room in the passage.

(b) This was a very popular question. There were some perceptive responses which drew on different interpretations of Iago's views. The most successful candidates could support the points about Iago's disdain and general misogyny with close reference to the text and well-selected, specific textual detail. Most candidates took a plot-based approach on how he uses Desdemona, Emilia and Bianca in his scheming and this generally led to a competent response. It was understood that he has no compunction about leading Othello to kill Desdemona and that he kills his own wife to shut her up. Credit was also given to candidates who used Iago's way of describing Othello's wooing of Desdemona to Brabantio as a further example of his misogyny. Some misconceptions were that Iago wanted to marry Desdemona presumably based on his unconvincing statement that he loves her too.

© 2024

Many candidates cited Iago's manner of speaking to Emilia, towards whom he shows no affection, speaking to at best with condescension, at worst with a brusque dismissiveness. The best answers demonstrated textual knowledge through quoting Iago's words to illustrate this. These answers focused on all three women, with proportionately less attention to the men whom Iago engages with in the play; weaker response tended to focus on the details of how Iago ensnares Othello featuring Desdemona as a pawn in his game rather than an illustration of Iago's attitude to women. There was much generalisation about the role of women in the 'patriarchal' society.

Weaker candidates gave generalised comments about Iago showing no respect for women, being rude to his wife, and ruining Desdemona's marriage, but with no textual support for the points made. There were many character sketches of Iago with some candidates erroneously commenting that his marriage was wonderful to an adoring wife.

Generally candidates understood his attitudes towards women, but lacked the textual knowledge to give well-supported points. In summarising what was required for high attainment in this question, as indeed with all questions, the first consideration is the need to be relevant. For example, how Iago uses Roderigo says a lot generally about his ruthless cunning, but it is only tangentially relevant to his treatment of women.

© 2024

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 2010/23
Drama 23

Key messages

- Successful answers began by introducing the main thrust of the answer, avoided lengthy historical background or plot summary and maintained focus on three or four main points in direct response to the question.
- Good answers ensured points were developed and supported with detailed reference to the text, often in the form of brief, memorised quotations.
- Strong answers to passage-based questions briefly stated the context of the passage and considered the content of the scene and the effects of the use of language, structure and staging.
- For answers to discursive questions, successful candidates made the best selection of relevant material from the whole text and used it to support a range of three or four directly relevant and developed points.
- Answers were boosted by personal engagement with the text which showed an appreciation of its stagecraft and considered likely audience response.

General comments

Most candidates responded well to their set plays, showing knowledge and understanding of characters' actions and motivations, while the best essays explored the playwright's use of stagecraft and language to achieve specific effects. There were some clearly reasoned and engaged responses. These candidates referred to relevant and detailed textual material in support of their points and addressed the question throughout. Strong answers addressed the terms of the question in a range of three or four salient points and supported them with a careful selection of the most apposite textual material. Candidates less adept at organising their answers often spent too long on relatively minor points and so missed out on the chance to develop points more relevant to the question asked. Candidates at all levels boosted their answers by conveying a lively personal response to the play as it presents on stage.

Successful answers focused on addressing key terms in the question, such as 'vividly', 'memorably', 'powerfully' or 'strikingly', and sustained the link to the question throughout the essay. Some candidates found it helpful to jot down very brief essay plans of a few lines, which noted the three or four points to be made and the most suitable material to use in support of them. The best essays to passage-based questions began by briefly giving the context of the passage to show understanding of its significance within the play, before exploring the passage itself in detail. The best essays to discursive questions began by considering the question and giving three or four key points before developing each one in detail and supporting them with brief, carefully selected and analysed quotations. Some candidates showed a lack of focus on the question by writing long, general introductions, narrating the plot, giving biographical details of the writer, or stating irrelevant social, cultural or historical background to the text. Others seemed to write down everything they knew about a play or character without linking it to the question.

Good answers explored how authors created dramatic effects. They considered how the writer presented characters through their actions and speech and their interactions with others. They explored how the author structured the play to highlight their ideas and entertained the audience by creating tension, humour or intrigue. In strong answers, analysis of the writing of the play explicitly considered its context within a scene and its intended effect on the audience. Other answers sometimes identified a feature of drama, such as foreshadowing or dramatic irony, but did not show understanding of its intended effect. Weaker answers sometimes commented on a feature an audience could not see or hear. An example was punctuation such as an exclamation mark, with the candidate claiming that it made the actor shout. To gain any credit for this, the candidate needed to show understanding of the context – what is the effect of that character shouting that line at that moment? Exclamations are not always intended to be shouted – they convey a character's surprise or emotion and how they are delivered depends on the context.

© 2024

This session there was a small number of rubric infringements in which candidates answered two passage-based or two discursive questions. In these cases, only the higher mark was credited. To avoid confusion, candidates need to number their answers accurately and clearly at the start of their responses.

Centres are reminded that in 2025 the texts *Othello* and *Crumbs from the Table of Joy* will be replaced by *A Taste of Honey* by Shelagh Delaney and William Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*.

Comments on specific questions

LYNN NOTTAGE: *Crumbs from the Table of Joy*

Question 1

(a) The passage forms the ending to the main part of the play before the epilogue. Candidates who considered this context recognised Ernestine's nearly adult perspective. Most answers were able to pick out aspects of the passage which shed light on the women's relationships.

Strong answers considered how Ernestine always admired Lily for being independent. Lily assures Ernestine she is not a communist, because she has more options for her future which were not open to Lily. They pointed out that Lily calling Ernestine by the shortened 'Ernie' shows the two are close. Lily shows her concern and love for Ernestine by encouraging her to 'find her own 'root' to the truth'. Perceptive answers considered how Lily's work on Ernestine's graduation dress symbolically illustrates how Lily values Ernestine's education because it gives her options for her future. Good answers considered how Ernestine's simple reply 'No?' illustrates how she is now ready to question advice and make reasoned decisions.

Ernestine's fantasy of Lily and Gerte dancing together was often seen as dramatically expressing Ernestine's desire for the two women to be friends. Better answers linked the vision to 'vividly' and gave their personal reaction to its humorous exaggeration. Some answers pointed out the distancing effect of the stage direction placing Lily and Gerte 'facing each other' and saw this as a sign that their relationship remains cold. Perceptive answers considered the subtle overtures of friendship made by Lily offering Gerte a drink, by Gerte touching Lily's shoulder, her attempt to repair their relationship by beginning 'I wish' – perhaps to wish things had been different between them – followed by Lily's embarrassed attempt to fend off Gerte's overture. Developed comments on this interaction considered that even if the two were not close friends, at least they were no longer enemies.

Weaker answers often made general comments based on material from earlier in the play, rather than focusing on the content of the passage, and needed to consider the actions and dialogue of the characters on stage to address 'vividly'.

(b) There was sympathy expressed for the overwhelming grief Godfrey felt at the death of his wife. Some showed understanding of how Godfrey's belief in Father Devine helped him cope with his grief, with some thoughtful answers claiming that his belief removed some of his responsibility for making decisions. Godfrey's experience of racism in New York was also generally considered as deserving sympathy, with reference to the racist physical attack.

Strong answers addressed 'to what extent' Godfrey deserved sympathy by developing their comments on his grief and religion. Thus, they saw that the extent of Godfrey's grief paralysed him and prevented him from making decisions; and that his unquestioning adherence to the strict rules imposed by Father Devine was selfish because it restricted not only his life but his daughters' too. The unnecessary move to New York and his surprise marriage to Gerte were also seen as being selfish. The shock and ferocity of the physical racist attack was explored sympathetically by a few candidates.

Candidates who had made a very brief plan at the start listing three or four points to include organised their responses well and covered a range of valid points, some including Godfrey's reticence with his daughters, his lack of ambition for Ernestine, and the family's relative poverty. Some candidates spent too long illustrating how Godfrey's grief was portrayed, and so their answer lacked range. Weak answers offered sympathy with only a little general reference to the text as support.

© 2024

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

Question 2

(a) Candidates who first established the context of the passage showed a better understanding of the text and some of its deeper implications. It is time for Elesin to fulfil his role as the King's Horseman and to guide the dead king to the world of his ancestors. It was helpful to consider that much of the drama and mystery of the passage is contained in how Elesin is preparing to die to carry out his role. Strong answers recognised how Elesin is deliberately falling into a trance and explored how the stage directions show this in terms such as 'semi-hypnosis', 'in a kind of daze', 'a little breathless' and 'with a solemn finality'. They explored the mysteriousness of Elesin's detailed description of his journey to an afterlife to meet the king. The best answers explored Elesin's dialogue and actions, commenting on the suspense and drama created by the call and response between Elesin and the Praise-Singer and how Elesin only hears 'faintly' as he begins his journey away from the world of the living. His faltering dance steps show him losing strength. The music and drumming add to the dramatic, mesmerising impact of the scene.

Some candidates explored Elesin's exchanges with the Praise-Singer in detail. They considered how the Praise-Singer is making sure Elesin is fulfilling his duty and explored their enigmatic use of traditional Yoruba sayings. They considered the implications of the Praise-Singer again offering to go with Elesin, or to go in his place if necessary; but that at this moment it seems as though Elesin is succeeding in his role.

Other answers quoted parts of the passage and attempted to comment on them, but without an understanding of their context which limited the answer. Weaker answers attempted to explain the role of the King's Horseman, but did not relate this to the passage, or simply narrated parts of the plot.

(b) Most candidates understood that Pilkings' role as District Officer is to enforce the law, but that in order to do this he does not consider it necessary to understand and empathise with local culture and customs. Stronger answers supported this with examples, such as Pilkings' wearing of Egungun costumes for entertainment thus defiling their sanctity. They understood the deeper implications of Pilkings' attitude, such as his desire to prevent Elesin's attempt at suicide because he believes it is inciting unrest amongst local Yoruba people, a belief reinforced by the insistent loud drumming heard from Yoruba villages. Fewer candidates made the point that although attempting to commit suicide is against British law, the ritual suicide of the King's Horseman forms part of Yoruba culture. The role of the King's Horseman is to die after the king and go with him to the afterlife, thus ensuring the future equilibrium of the Yoruba world. Perceptive candidates suggested that by preventing Elesin's suicide, Pilkings actually incites unrest in Yoruba society.

Many candidates balanced Pilkings' lack of understanding of Yoruba culture and practices with Elesin's own reluctance to fulfil his role, shown in his love of life in the market place, his delaying tactics in marrying the girl, in Iyaloja's angry and bitter accusations of Elesin in the police cell, and in Elesin's own sense of responsibility, shame and suicide at the end. Some explored the tragedy of Olunde's sacrifice of his life in an honourable attempt to fulfil his father's duty in his place.

Responsibility for the failure of Elesin's ritual suicide was divided between Pilkings and Elesin. Weaker candidates struggled to support their arguments with apt textual reference, and the weakest lost focus on the question and narrated Elesin's actions in the market-place, or Pilkings' actions at the ball.

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: *A Streetcar Named Desire*

Question 3

(a) Candidates who placed the passage in context knew that it occurs the morning after the poker party when Stanley got drunk and hit Stella, and understood that it is because of this that Blanche wants Stella to leave Stanley. Most candidates commented on Blanche's memorable sense of her own social superiority and how she denigrates Stanley by comparing his actions graphically to those of animals. They usually supported comments with apt textual support, such as 'apes … grunting… and swilling and gnawing and hulking!' Stronger answers explored the effects of such

© 2024

exaggerated and graphic language in cementing the audience's opinions of Stanley as someone who instinctively acts on his desires rather than exercising restraint and reasoning.

Stella's cold response to Blanche in her invitation to her to '...say it all' was clearly seen by some as indicating her disagreement with Blanche's opinion of Stanley. Some also pointed out that her disagreement with Blanche is memorably shown by the physicality of her welcome as she embraces Stanley 'fiercely'.

Some weaker answers spent too long on Blanche's dialogue rather than moving on to analyse the dramatic staging effects of Stanley hiding as he listens to Blanche viciously insult him. Stronger answers commented on the dramatic irony and how it creates tension for the audience as they wait for Stanley's reaction. Others made insightful comments comparing Stanley to a predator ominously waiting to ambush his prey. Perceptive answers considered that the way Stanley refrains from interrupting shows his intelligence and ability to exercise restraint, contrary to Blanche's opinion of him, and how his knowledge of Blanche's opinion of him gives him power. The stage direction describing his animalistic gesture of 'licking his lips' shows how he relishes hearing Blanche's views, which makes him feel justified in hurting her later in the play. How he 'grins' at Blanche indicates his feeling of victory over her as Stella chooses him over her sister, which is significant because at the end of the play, she also chooses to believe Stanley rather than Blanche.

Most candidates made relevant comments on Blanche's memorable comparison of Stanley to animals, with some comment on the effect of Stanley hiding as he listens. Weaker answers needed to explore the writing and staging in more detail.

(b) Candidates who took a moment to think about how best to approach this question and to select the most relevant supporting material to include, organised their responses well and covered a range of valid points. Some candidates made a brief plan of these points. Good answers commonly considered how Stanley hits Stella during the poker night because she threatens his authority by playing music, how he tells Mitch about Blanche's promiscuous past to sour their relationship, and his rape of Blanche perhaps to get rid of her, to punish her for her lies, from revenge for her views of him – or just because he can. Stronger answers explored the motivations for his cruelty and the effect of his actions on others; some perceptively traced an escalation of intensity and seriousness in his actions in the play.

Most candidates explored Stanley's character to explain his cruelty. They considered how he sees himself as the dominant male in the household, and if this position is threatened, he uses violence to secure it. Stronger answers also considered his psychological cruelty towards Blanche. He toys with her, such as pretending to give her a birthday gift, when he has cruelly bought her a one-way ticket back to Laurel, when he knows she is unwelcome there and unable to return. He destroys her fantasies and exposes her past to Mitch to ruin her chances of marriage. He physically asserts his dominance over her with the rape, with no thought for her physical or mental well-being; and cruelly shows no compassion for her breakdown afterwards, even lying to his wife about it.

The best answers maintained focus on Stanley's cruelty, citing the strongest examples. Others wrote generally about Stanley's character, spending too long on aspects such as his machismo, the physicality of his love for Stella, his anger at Blanche's loss of Belle Reve, or his bonding with male friends in poker and bowling. Weaker answers narrated parts of the play which feature Stanley and asserted he was cruel.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

Question 4

(a) Candidates often expressed their enjoyment of this play in lively personal responses. The best answers began by placing the passage in context; the mechanicals are in the wood rehearsing their play, when Puck happens upon them; nearby, he has just administered the love potion to a sleeping Titania. Bottom's singing at the end of this passage wakes Titania who promptly falls in love with him.

Most candidates commented well on the entertainment provided by the mechanicals, whose enthusiastic but inexperienced acting is humorous for the audience. Examples given included actors forgetting their cues, misinterpreting their lines and creating absurdities such as men playing 'Wall'. Stronger answers noted the sincerity of the mechanicals' misguided efforts. Perceptive

© 2024

answers considered how Puck is almost part of the audience, since he stays to watch, and he mirrors the audience response. Good answers responded to staging effects, pointing out that Puck is invisible to the mechanicals, which enables him to mock them and create confusion without discovery; some explored the contrasting lyricism of Puck's rhyming speech as he uses magic to swiftly change his appearance, with the ensuing chaos mirrored in the quick succession of images and sounds he uses.

Some weaker answers did not understand Puck's actions. Some candidates did not comment beyond the rehearsals, and so limited their answers. Others responded well to Puck's mischief in switching Bottom's own head for that of an ass, often pointing out how apt this is, since Bottom is as foolish as asses are supposed to be. Some weaker answers showed confusion: some thought all of Bottom was now an ass, not just his head, and some thought that in the place of his head he now had a donkey's bottom. Some weaker answers agreed with Bottom and thought that the mechanicals were playing a trick on him. Better answers explored the dialogue more accurately and noted the mechanicals' shock and how their fear makes them run off. Stronger answers explored stagecraft and dramatic irony; the audience know that Puck has created the chaos on stage, but the mechanicals do not, and so their extreme reactions are funny. Some candidates commented on the irony of Bottom's comments on 'ass-head' and how he is being made 'an ass', while being unaware of his literal ass-head; and there were perceptive comments on how the banal singing of Bottom reflects his foolish character and compares unfavourably with Puck's exciting rhyming earlier.

The best answers engaged with the context and humour of the passage and explored writing and staging effects. Most answers addressed the mechanicals' attempts at a play rehearsal. Weaker answers knew some of the plot but needed to use detailed textual reference and to show understanding of staging.

(b) Most candidates recognised that Helena feels she has been treated unfairly. Strong answers selected support from three main areas of the text: early in the play when Helena compares herself unfavourably to Hermia and asks her how she attracts Demetrius so that she can do the same; when Helena follows Demetrius into the wood and begs him to love her, and lastly when the love potion makes both Lysander and Demetrius declare their love for Helena, making her think that the men and Hermia are all playing a trick on her to mock her and she openly accuses her friends of treating her unfairly.

Candidates who made a brief plan which included their main points and the most suitable supporting material, often had well organised answers covering a range of points. Others often used a narrow focus on the text which limited their answers. Those who used apt supporting text wrote stronger answers. The most convincing textual support was in the form of short quotations.

The best answers analysed the effects of some of the language in conveying Helena's hurt feelings. They often discussed how Helena is so desperate for attention from Demetrius that she debases herself to him when she begs him to 'Use me but as your spaniel', begging him to hit her rather than ignore her. There were personal responses which suggested Demetrius does not deserve her love. They reminded us that at the end, Demetrius remains under the love spell, so it is not clear how far his love for Helena is real. Some astute candidates judged that all that mattered for the happy ending to the play was that Helena was content.

Perceptive answers developed their points. Some explored how dramatic irony leads the audience to laugh at Helena's situation, despite her injured feelings; they know about the love potion, and so find humour in the lovers' quarrel. The enchanted men use comically overblown language such as 'O Helen, goddess', and the erstwhile friends, Helena and Hermia, argue with comic intensity which includes threats of violence and name-calling, such as 'you counterfeit, you puppet'. Weaker answers did not include textual detail, or narrated events without analysis or reference to the question; some candidates confused the characters.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Othello*

Question 5

(a) Most answers recognised how Iago portrays himself to Othello as being loyal. Good answers quoted textual support to show Iago's technique, such as how he obsequiously begs Othello's pardon 'For too much loving' him. Strong answers explored the effect of this; it convinces Othello

© 2024

that Iago has Othello's best interests at heart because of his love for him. This in turn leads Othello to trust Iago and focus on what he says instead of his motives in saying it. This allows Iago to cast doubt on Desdemona's honour without incurring suspicion himself. One candidate aptly described Iago's technique as 'sycophantic villainy'.

Most candidates realised that Iago is not actually loyal to Othello. Better answers supported this by stating Iago's motive of revenge (for being passed over for promotion) and the context of the passage. Iago has set up this moment by advising Cassio to ask Desdemona to plead with Othello for his reinstatement. After Iago has raised suspicions of Cassio and Desdemona's relationship, any preference Desdemona expresses for Cassio can only reinforce Othello's suspicions.

Strong answers explored how Iago is portrayed through his dialogue. They commented how he does not lie here by inventing 'proof' of Desdemona's supposed infidelity, which could be refuted. He is subtle and only hints at possible transgressions. The effect of this is to make Othello picture the worst, because he thinks that Iago 'doubtless Sees and knows more…than he unfolds'. Other good answers explored how Iago plays on Othello's weaknesses to provide apparent justification for Desdemona's infidelity. He refers to Othello being an outsider and unaware of how Venetian wives habitually deceive their husbands, he points out that Desdemona deceived her father by marrying, so may also deceive Othello and he hints that Desdemona's love for Othello is 'unnatural' due to their different race. Perceptive answers suggested that all these reasons lessen Othello's trust in Desdemona, until by the end of the passage he is convinced that she is false.

The best answers explored the subtlety of Iago's manipulation of Othello and analysed the dialogue. Some perceptive answers considered the effect of dramatic irony in creating tension, since the audience know Iago is deceiving Othello and that Desdemona is true and so they fear for the outcome. Weaker answers were unsure of Desdemona's honesty; some believed she and Cassio were lovers, and some took Iago's declarations of love and honesty at face value. Others needed to explore the writing of the passage in detail.

(b) Most candidates understood that Roderigo is a victim of Iago, who uses him to achieve revenge against Othello for not promoting him. Most understood how Iago claims to be propositioning Desdemona on Roderigo's behalf while cheating him out of money and jewels by pretending to give them to her as tokens of Roderigo's love. Stronger answers showed how Roderigo tries to hold Iago accountable for his failure with Desdemona, but Iago easily quietens his complaints and continues to take advantage of the naïve young nobleman. Thoughtful candidates weighed up how far Roderigo's own character flaws contribute to his falling victim to Iago; Roderigo can not be very intelligent to think that Desdemona's virtue can be bought with expensive gifts, and his morals are questionable to want to try to corrupt Desdemona. Brabantio had not thought him worthy enough to be a suitor for Desdemona, while Iago dismisses him as 'poor trash of Venice'.

Good answers considered other examples of Roderigo being Iago's victim, such as the opening to the play, when Iago uses Roderigo to inform Brabantio of Desdemona's elopement with Othello, while remaining unidentified himself. Iago continues to use Roderigo to further his plans for revenge; Iago persuades Roderigo to start a fight with Cassio, on the grounds that Cassio is a rival for Desdemona's love. Rightly, Roderigo is wary of fighting Cassio, who is a brave and able soldier; but again, Iago is able to convince Roderigo to do what he wants.

Strong answers considered the tragedy of Roderigo's death, when he has become a liability to Iago by finally realising how he has been fooled. He falls victim to Iago's ruthlessness and is tragically killed by him. A few candidates commented on the way the truth about Iago's treachery is confirmed in letters found in Roderigo's pockets, but sadly too late to help Roderigo or to prevent Othello's murderous actions.

The best answers sustained a focus on how Roderigo was duped into following all of Iago's instructions. Some blamed Roderigo's weak morality and intelligence for how easily he was tricked, while others pointed out that Roderigo is not the only character to be cleverly manipulated by Iago. Brief essay plans often helped candidates to cover a range of pertinent points and to use apt textual support, often in the form of short quotation. Weaker answers struggled to remember the part played by Roderigo in any detail; the weakest confused Roderigo with Cassio and so made few relevant points.

© 2024