LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 2010/12
Poetry and Prose

Key messages

In successful responses, candidates:

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

In less successful responses, candidates:

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

General comments

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

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

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

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

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

© 2025

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

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

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

Question 2

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

Question 3

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

Question 4

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

Question 5

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

© 2025

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

Question 6

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

Section B

Question 7

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

Question 8

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

Question 9

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

Question 10

There were too few responses to make meaningful comment.

Question 11

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

© 2025

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

Question 12

There were too few responses to make meaningful comment.

Question 13

There were too few responses to make meaningful comment.

Question 14

There were too few responses to make meaningful comment.

Question 15

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

Question 16

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

Question 17

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

Question 18

There were too few responses to make meaningful comment.

Question 19

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

© 2025

Question 20

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

Question 21

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

Question 22

There were too few responses to make meaningful comment.

© 2025

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 2010/13
Poetry and Prose

Key messages

In successful responses, candidates:

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

In less successful responses, candidates:

- begin their answers with unnecessary background information or a list of devices the writer uses
- refer in general terms to 'themes' they have revised without addressing the key words of the question
- depend on narration, explanation and/or assertion rather than close analysis
- use long quotations without analysing the effects created by specific words, phrases and sounds
- log writing devices without exploring the effects created.
- use ellipses in quotations which omit those key words that would support their ideas
- make general personal responses about ideas not actually in the text, including references to their own lives.

General comments

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

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

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

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

© 2025

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

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

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

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

Question 2

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

Question 3

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

Question 4

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

Question 5

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

© 2025

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

Question 6

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

Section B

Question 7

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

Question 8

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

Question 9

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

Question 10

There were too few responses to make meaningful comment.

Question 11

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

© 2025

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

Question 12

There were too few responses to make meaningful comment.

Question 13

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

Question 14

There were too few responses to make meaningful comment.

Question 15

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

Question 16

There were too few responses to make meaningful comment.

Question 17

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

Question 18

There were too few responses to make meaningful comment.

Question 19

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

© 2025

Question 20

There were too few responses to make meaningful comment.

Question 21

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

Question 22

There were too few responses to make meaningful comment.

© 2025

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 2010/22
Drama

Key messages

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

General comments

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

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

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

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

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

© 2025

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

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

Listing literary features as a way in which a passage was, for example, 'dramatic' or 'revealing', is an unproductive way to start a response. The selection of the most relevant material and issues to be discussed is an important skill; simply working through a passage or the text, without focus on the terms of the question is unlikely to achieve high reward. Candidates are reminded not to refer to line numbers instead of quoting from the text as this limits opportunities for analysis of the ways writers achieve effects.

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

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

Comments on specific questions

SHELAGH DELANEY: *A Taste of Honey*

Question 1

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

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

© 2025

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

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

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

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

Question 2

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

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

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

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

© 2025

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

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

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: *A Streetcar Named Desire*

Question 3

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

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

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

© 2025

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

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE*: A Midsummer's Night Dream*

Question 4

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

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

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

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

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

© 2025

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE*: Antony and Cleopatra*

Question 5

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

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

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

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

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

© 2025

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 2010/23
Drama

Key messages

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

General comments

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

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

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

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

© 2025

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

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

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

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

Comments on specific questions

SHELAGH DELANEY: *A Taste of Honey*

Question 1

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

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

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

© 2025

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

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

Question 2

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

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

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

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

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: *A Streetcar Named Desire*

Question 3

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

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

© 2025

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

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

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

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

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

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

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

Question 4

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

© 2025

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

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

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

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

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

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Antony and Cleopatra*

Question 5

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

© 2025

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

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

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

© 2025