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LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/12
Drama and Poetry

Key messages

- Candidates answering option **(a)** questions should analyse specific details of the text within the argument presented.
- Candidates answering option **(b)** passage-based questions should place the passage in the wider context of the text.

General comments

The general standard was satisfactory with all candidates showing at least a sound knowledge of the set texts. There were very few rubric errors in this session and also very few responses which showed evidence of mismanagement of time. The quality of expression was at least acceptable in nearly every case, although there were some candidates with expressive weaknesses which impeded communication at this level.

There are two specific issues to be addressed in this session:

- Assessment Objective 2 states that candidates should 'analyse ways in which writers' choices of language, form and structure shape meanings and effects'. Candidates attempting option **(b)** passage-based questions often showed evidence of meeting this Assessment Objective in their responses to the given passage. However, candidates attempting option **(a)** questions also need to provide evidence that they are able to do this, by quoting or referring closely to specific moments in the text. They should discuss these references in detail, focusing on the writer's choices and exploring what for the candidate are the effects of those choices.
- Candidates responding to option **(b)** passage-based questions, who briefly place the passage within the wider work it is selected from, often write more focused and relevant answers. This equally applies to passages from poetry selections as well as the drama texts on paper 1.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1 ARTHUR MILLER: *All My Sons*

(a) There were too few responses to this question to make a general comment appropriate.

(b) Many candidates placed the passage within the context of the wider text, with nearly all answers showing at least a sound knowledge and understanding of the significance of the passage. Weaker answers tended either to paraphrase the dialogue or to give a more general summary of the play's action and its characters. Better answers at this level remained focused on the presentation of the women, often choosing to consider Sue, Lydia and Anne. Analysis at this level often consisted of comparing and contrasting the words and actions of the women, with better answers exploring some of the effects of Miller's stage directions. More successful answers focused on Miller's dramatic methods throughout – his use of the male attitudes to the women, the tension created in the dialogues between husbands and wives and the build up to the later appearance of Anne. Good answers turned such ideas into a consideration of the structure of the play. Some discussed how Miller uses these early exchanges to create 'a dramatic arc in which this seemingly ideal neighbourhood and the main family in it, the Kellers, are shattered by revelations from the past,' as one essay suggested. Very good answers developed such interpretations further, for example, by detailed analysis of some of the details of language and a consideration of the symbolic

significance of the tree. Where there was a structured and detailed argument underpinning such approaches, the answers did very well.

Question 2 WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Much Ado About Nothing*

(a) There were too few responses to this question to make a general comment appropriate.

(b) There were too few responses to this question to make a general comment appropriate.

Question 3 WOLE SOYINKA: *The Trials of Brother Jero and Jero's Metamorphosis*

(a) There were too few responses to this question to make a general comment appropriate.

(b) There were too few responses to this question to make a general comment appropriate.

Question 4 THOMAS MIDDLETON AND WILLIAM ROWLEY: *The Changeling*

(a) There were too few responses to this question to make a general comment appropriate.

(b) There were too few responses to this question to make a general comment appropriate.

Question 5 ROBERT BROWNING: *Selected Poems*

(a) There were too few responses to this question to make a general comment appropriate.

(b) There were too few responses to this question to make a general comment appropriate.

Question 6 OWEN SHEERS: *Skirrid Hill*

(a) There were too few responses to this question to make a general comment appropriate.

(b) There were too few responses to this question to make a general comment appropriate.

Question 7 Songs of Ourselves, Volume 2

(a) There were too few responses to this question to make a general comment appropriate.

(b) This was the most popular question on the paper. Weaker answers tended to paraphrase the poem line by line or offer a general summary with some generally relevant comments on the effects of the war. Better answers at this level were able to explore the meaning of Gurney's poem, often showing understanding of some of the key themes in it, with many noticing the sudden shift in mood and atmosphere at the appearance of the snowdrops. Better answers linked such ideas to the poetic methods, often focusing on language and imagery, for example. Others explored the rhythms and Gurney's use of rhyme, with some noticing the possible effects of his choices – 'the monotony and grim harshness of the soldiers' life', as one answer put it. Good answers developed their interpretations of the meaning of the poem by close reference to the details of Gurney's poetic methods. Very good responses explored the different effects of his choices – such as his use of 'I' and 'we', his poetic voice and how he draws the reader into the poetic reality of the soldiers' lives with 'casually mentioned details such as home talk and chess,' as one candidate suggested. Where such discussions were structured and focused on the task with a clear sense of purpose, the answers often did very well.

Question 8 GILLIAN CLARKE: *Selected Poems*

(a) There were too few responses to this question to make a general comment appropriate.

(b) There were too few responses to this question to make a general comment appropriate.

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LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/22
Prose and Unseen

Key messages

- Responses which summarise the content of texts or extracts are not successful.
- Successful responses focus on the writing of the texts and how the meaning and content is communicated to the reader.
- Successful responses use analysis of specific references and quotations to support points in essays. This should be particularly remembered for the **(a)** questions, where candidates select their own material to answer the question.
- Successful responses to **(b)** passage-based questions analyse the writing of the selected text or extract in detail.
- Successful responses to the 'unseen' section explore how the literary features contribute to the meaning and the reader's understanding.

General comments

Most candidates showed knowledge of the subject matter of the texts, and many were confident in exploring ways in which the writers communicate their concerns through choices of language, form and structure. Some essays would have benefited from a clearer focus on the writing of the texts. This is particularly true of the **(a)** questions, where candidates would be more successful with some analysis of specific episodes from the texts.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1 E M Forster: *Howards End*

(a) There were too few responses to this question to make a general comment appropriate.

(b) Most candidates placed the occasion of Mrs Ruth Wilcox's funeral appropriately within the novel. Many responses explored Forster's portrayal of the differing reactions of the rich and the poor, considering that the wealthy 'carriages…rolled away' while 'the poor remained'. Mr Wilcox's provision of 'black garments' was usually interpreted as a desire for superficial show on his part; fewer noted that he is described as 'a kind gentleman' by the villagers. The sense of the drama and 'excitement' of the funeral for the poor was commented on, with details of their glances at the 'coffin' in its 'newly dug shaft', together with their sympathetic appreciation of Mrs Wilcox as one of the last of the 'old sort' who are 'kind'. A number of candidates appreciated Forster's contrast of life and death, with the woodcutter replacing the gravediggers at the graveside and taking the flower for his lover. Some noted that the chrysanthemum was Margaret's specific choice for Mrs Wilcox, while others commented that after the activity of the funeral, the last paragraph suggests its insignificance in the larger scheme. Most discussion was sensible, with some perceptiveness on occasion, though there was little notice taken of the narrative position, with the funeral observed from above, from the top of a tree, by the woodcutter, 'high above their heads'.

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Question 2 Andrea Levy: *Small Island*

(a) There were too few responses to this question to make a general comment appropriate.

(b) The significance of this passage as the end of the novel was recognised by candidates and several saw a direct contrast with Hortense's arrival at Queenie's house with her trunk earlier in the novel. In considering how the episode is effective as the novel's ending, many answers showed an effective awareness of Hortense's character development, from the naïve and snobbish figure of the novel's opening to a more compassionate and experienced woman at this point, looking forward to living her life in her own home rather than in Queenie's rooms, whose unattractive features are listed towards the end of the extract. Candidates commented on the 'banging', 'crashing' and 'thumping' of the trunk, mirroring its arrival in the house. Although Hortense still considers it her 'good trunk', she makes far less fuss about it here, being more concerned with the baby she is holding. The language of peace was noted, with the baby 'Drowsy', with 'languid eyes' and a 'smile' while Hortense 'hushed him with whispered words'. From these details, several candidates suggested Hortense's ease with the child, suggestive of future happiness, while alert essays noted that her term of affection, 'Me sprigadee', directly recalls her own childhood in Jamaica. Though some candidates thought that Hortense's decision to keep her discovery of the money secret represented a deceit which boded ill for her relationship with Gilbert, most saw it as a wise act, to store something away for future emergencies. Nearly all answers discussed the irony of the identity of the baby, fathered by 'Some fool-fool Jamaican with an eye for the shapely leg on a pretty white woman', her phrase being uncannily accurate, and the odd appropriateness of her raising Michael's child. There was some sensitive response to Queenie's presence on the other side of the door and better answers noted that, after her narration refers throughout to 'Mrs Bligh', in the last piece of dialogue, Hortense addresses her as 'Queenie' for the first time. The last paragraph too often elicited thoughtful comment on the characterisation of both Hortense and Gilbert, Gilbert's disarray being typical and a contrast to a sign of the old Hortense, who 'adjusted my hat in case it sagged in the damp air and left me looking comical'. Some too saw the final line's reference to 'cold' as a metaphor for the future difficulties likely to be faced by the couple.

Question 3 *Stories of Ourselves, Volume 2*

(a) There were too few responses to this question to make a general comment appropriate.

(b) While there was some capable writing on this extract, a number of candidates were not able to explore the subtleties of the text fully as they seemed unaware of the story's ending and Peyton Farquhar's fate. Essays which acknowledged the ending of Bierce's tale were able to explore the ironies in Farquhar's desperate struggles to escape and his apparent success at the end of the selected passage. Those ironies begin in the first sentence, which describes Farquhar 'as one already dead'. Candidates often noted the frequent use of language suggesting pain, such as 'pressure', 'suffocation', 'agonies', 'pulsating fire', 'sharp pain', 'direst pang', 'racked', 'wrenched' and 'insupportable anguish' to convey the character's experience, combined with words and phrases which communicate his immense efforts to escape, such as 'awakened', 'struggle', 'splendid effort', 'superhuman strength', 'pounced', 'tore', 'beat the water vigorously' and 'emerge'. Detailed responses looked too at Bierce's depiction of Farquhar's state of mind, where for a time he is 'conscious of nothing' before noticing the 'gleam of light', while he views his own efforts in a detached way, 'as an idler might observe the feat of a juggler'. Through the vigour of such presentation, some candidates argued, Bierce conveys Farquhar being deceived by his own mind, which in turn deceived the reader, leading to the twist of revelation at the end of the story.

Question 4 Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o: *A Grain of Wheat*

(a) There were too few responses to this question to make a general comment appropriate.

(b) There were too few responses to this question to make a general comment appropriate.

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Question 5 Poetry

Most candidates recognised the sonnet form of the poem though fewer were able to articulate how the poet utilises the structure of the Elizabethan sonnet, with the ideas developed through the three quatrains before the conclusion in the final couplet. Some responses commented on the popularity of the form for love poetry in the sixteenth century, showing knowledge of the literary context through genre. There were several confident answers which explored the balance of the poem's language, on the one hand traditionally romantic, with frequent references to 'love' and 'heart' but on the other rather mercantile, with 'exchange' and 'bargain driven'. Strong answers explored ways in which the 'bargain' language of the poem is reinforced by structure, with consistently balanced phrases holding 'I', 'me' and 'my' in equilibrium with 'his' and 'him', creating through language and structure the sense of the 'just exchange' of each other's hearts. In some answers there was confusion about the exchange of hearts in II.7–8 and about the 'wound' and 'hurt' of the third quatrain. Some found the swapping of hearts uncomfortable and missed the force of the verbs 'loves' and 'cherish'. The conventional idea of lovers being 'wounded' by cupid's arrows and lovers traditionally suffering the pains of love was not recognised in a number of responses. A number of candidates saw the references to 'hurt' as strife and even violence in the relationship. Those responses which were alert to the traditional ideas saw how it is resolved in the couplet, where 'hurt' is balanced by 'bliss' and the equilibrium of the relationship is emphasised in the parallel phrases of the final line.

Most responses showed some understanding of the poem and competent answers usually made useful reference to the language and the sonnet structure. Confident responses explored these aspects in detail, with some perceptive comments on the effects of language, imagery and the poem's structure.

Question 6 Prose

Nearly all responses to this passage demonstrated awareness of its mix of tone, with a highly perilous situation being narrated with unexpected humour. There was occasional confusion about the 'huge cloud' at the beginning of the extract, but most recognised the speaker's dreamy uncertainty reflected in the simile before he, in a more alert state, recognises the leopard. Some responses noted the understatement of 'I didn't feel so glad', compared with 'the most terrifying moment of my life' at the end of the same paragraph. Many commented on the unexpectedness of the former reaction to the leopard, often developed with reference to the speaker's discussion of his clothing and the animal's response to it. Here candidates' views varied. Many appreciated the humour of the narrator being 'embarrassed' by the state of his 'unfashionable' trousers, while others were bemused. The same variation of response was clear in comments about the narrator's thought that he does not want 'the wild animals of the neighbourhood to sneer at' him. Whatever their response, this consideration meant that most candidates discussed ways in which the narration characterises the narrator and creates a sense of voice, which is the central narrative method of the passage. Candidates focused on different areas of the language of the passage, such as that which characterises the leopard, like 'sniffing suspiciously' and 'studying my trousers', along with the narrator's judgement that it is 'trying to find a good place to bite'. Others also looked at the narrator's worry about his 'unfashionable' trousers and his desire 'to explain' to the leopard; they considered how the leopard's proximity is made clear by the 'hot gasps' of breath on his face and his sense of the 'jaws at my throat'. Structure tended to be less confidently handled, though there were some instances of candidates writing successfully about the short sentence sequence of the first paragraph and the sense of relief in line 49 which is suddenly extinguished in the short sentences of lines 50–51. Candidates could have improved by discussing the progression of paragraphs which highlight the stages of the leopard's examination of the narrator's body: the acknowledgment of the reality in paragraph 2, the digression of the third, the animal's examination of trousers in the fourth, the shirt in the fifth and the narrator's face in the fifth paragraph before that shift to relief and then further danger in the final paragraph.

Most candidates showed evidence of understanding the extract. Less successful answers could have improved by focusing on the demands of the question rather than providing a narrative summary of the extract. Those who focused more clearly on aspects of the writing were able to show some competence in their discussion. Some detailed and careful answers demonstrated some subtlety and perception.

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Paper 9695/32
Shakespeare and Drama

There were too few candidates for a meaningful report to be produced.

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LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/42
Pre- and Post-1900 Poetry and Prose

There were too few candidates for a meaningful report to be produced.