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LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/12
Drama and Poetry

Key messages

- Learners should plan their essays carefully before starting to write an answer.
- Learners should ensure they address the idea of 'presentation' in appropriate questions.

General comments

There were responses seen at most levels of the mark scheme, though to only a few of the texts on the paper. The large majority of learners showed evidence of appropriate preparation, with at least a sound knowledge of their two texts. Evidence of appropriate preparation was seen in the way that most learners were able to select relevant material with which to address the given tasks. There were very few rubric errors in this session, but it is important that learners understand the optionality on the paper if they are to achieve the best mark possible. The quality of the expression was generally appropriate to the task, with some very good examples of essay writing seen from some learners. Other learners are at times disadvantaged by a lack of clarity and precision in their writing.

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

1 Few learners showed any evidence of planning their essays before starting to write them or of carefully considering the terms of task. Because of this, many answers did not fully address the question, or lost direction and structure in their essays. It is important that learners take a few moments to select relevant material with which to answer the question and, at the same time, decide on the structure of their essay, with an appropriate and relevant introduction and conclusion. Such preplanning would have improved a number of the responses seen by giving them a clearer sense of direction and purpose.

2 Many of the questions on this paper refer to the writer's 'presentation' of a specific element in the text or in the passage from the text. Learners should note that this does require them to consider the writer's choices, which may include genre-specific methods, such as stage directions or more general matters of style such as choices of imagery and language. Many less successful answers would be improved by ensuring that these points are considered fully, as well as providing evidence of knowledge and understanding of the text.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Drama

Question 1

ERROL JOHN: *Moon on a Rainbow Shawl*

(a) There were too few responses to the **(a)** question on this text to be able to make a general comment on performance

(b) There were too few responses to the **(b)** question on this text to be able to make a general comment on performance.

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Question 2

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Measure for Measure*

This was a popular choice of text although the majority of learners chose the **(a)** essay option.

(a) Nearly every answer to this question had a sound knowledge of the text and was able to select relevant material to address the task. Weaker answers tended to summarise different conflicts, with some awareness of their significance, often in terms of the characters. Popular choices were Angelo and Isabella, Claudio and Isabella and the comic characters in the subplot with authority. More competent answers had greater understanding of some of the complexities of Shakespeare's use of conflict to 'develop the plot and the characters', as one suggested. Other answers explored internal and external conflict, noting, for example, how Angelo's 'moral conflict over his desire for Isabella is significant in his later redemption', as one essay argues. Good answers were able to develop such ideas by considering Shakespeare's dramatic methods. Popular choices were: his use of comedy at key moments, with Lucio's attack on the Duke a good reference point; the contrasting settings 'from convent to courthouse to prison', as one learner noted; and in the most successful answers there was some awareness of language and action as 'key ways in which the conflict is presented', as one essay suggested. Where such discussions were supported by detailed reference to the text and some awareness of relevant contexts, the answers did very well.

(b) This was a less popular choice on this text. Nearly every answer was able to place the passage in its context of the other court proceedings and most were aware of the essentially comic nature of the extract. Weaker answers tended to summarise Escalus's role in the wider text, with too little focus on the details of the passage. Better answers at this level did consider some of the detail with some answers noticing 'the amusing language of Escalus and Pompey', for example. More competent responses analysed the contrasting way in which Escalus 'talks to Elbow and Pompey', though others noted the 'violent undertones of his language – hung, drawn and whipping'. Good answers explored the ironic undertones of Pompey's responses, 'which show how the wicked are unrepentant and the wise lacking in understanding', as one suggested. Very good answers considered Shakespeare's choices here, noting the methods of characterisation, such as how Escalus is set against the comic characters, as well as both Angelo and the Duke in the way he administers justice. Where such points were supported by close reference to the text, the answers did well.

Question 3

JOHN WEBSTER: *The Duchess of Malfi*

(a) There were too few responses to the **(a)** question on this text to be able to make a general comment on performance

(b) There were too few responses to the **(b)** question on this text to be able to make a general comment on performance.

Question 4

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

This was the most popular text from **Section B**, with over half of the learners choosing this text, the vast majority of whom tackled the **(b)** passage option.

(a) Nearly all learners were able to select relevant material with which to address the question, often showing detailed and accurate knowledge of the text. Most answers identified how different characters responded to family life, with Brick, Maggie, Mae and Gooper, and Big Mama most often discussed. Weaker answers tended to summarise these characters' roles in the family, rather than their attitudes to it. Better answers at this level showed some understanding of Williams's methods of characterisation and how he used the different attitudes to shape the audience responses to the characters, with Mae and Gooper most negatively viewed and Big Mama most positively. More competent answers distinguished how the different attitudes were revealed, often with supporting references to the text, though language and tone was only rarely analysed in detail. Good essays explored how the 'different attitudes lead to conflicts within the family, such as Mae and Maggie targeting the inheritance', as remarked. Other good answers saw that the 'attitudes were

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dependent on the individual's agenda', with one or two essays exemplifying this in 'the lack of empathy about Big Daddy's cancer' or through 'the very different responses to the children, from violence to affection', as one learner argued. Where the ideas were underpinned by precise references to the text and a clear appreciation of relevant contexts, the answers did well.

(b) This was the second most popular question on the paper, chosen by just over half of the entry. Nearly all of the learners were able explain the context for the passage, often as a means of assessing its significance. Weaker answers tended to retell the story of Maggie, Brick and Skipper, often in accurate detail, though sometimes with too little focus on the given passage. More competent answers were alive to the changing tone and mood, from the violence and threat of the couple's interactions to the 'almost comic entrance and actions of Dixie', as one noted. Better answers looked carefully at Williams's dramatic methods, including the stage directions and how 'what the actors do, and the audience experiences, is carefully controlled by the dramatist', as one learner suggested. Good answers looked closely at the language, contrasting Maggie's 'constant chatter with Brick's silence, until Dixie enters'. Others noted the violent actions, the 'crutch and cap gun as symbolic weapons', and how Maggie's 'attitude to Dixie reveals her true hatred of children, just as Big Mama described', as one essay argued. Her relationship with Brick was often discussed, with good answers analysing the way that through the words and actions, the 'gulf between them and how it was created is laid bare to the audience', as one learner stated. Where such arguments were supported by precise references to the passage and the wider text, the answers did very well.

Section B: Poetry

Question 5

MAYA ANGELOU: *And Still I Rise*

(a) There were too few responses to the **(a)** question on this text to be able to make a general comment on performance.

(b) There were only a few responses to this question, with overall only a partial knowledge of the poem and a basic understanding of its meaning. Weak answers attempted to paraphrase its meaning with too little focus on the relationship, which was required by the question. Most were aware that the relationship had changed and that Angelou uses the passing of time to reflect those changes. There was little appreciation of the poetic methods, so that Angelou's poetic presentation of the relationship was rarely addressed with any confidence.

Question 6

SIMON ARMITAGE*: Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

There were too few responses to this text to be able to make a general comment on performance on either of the options.

Question 7

WILLIAM BLAKE: Selected Poems from *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*

There were too few responses to this text to be able to make a general comment on performance on either of the options.

Question 8

Songs of Ourselves, Volume 2

(a) There were too few responses to the **(a)** question on this text to be able to make a general comment on performance.

(b) This was by far the most popular question on the paper, with almost three quarters of the entry offering it. Lower-level answers tended to paraphrase the poem line by line or offer a general summary with some generally relevant personal response. There was some confusion about the speaker's relationship to the woman, though where the learner had an appropriate grasp of the

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context, this did not occur. Sounder answers at this level, noting the question, did consider the woman and the speaker's changing attitude to her, in detail, often linking the development of the poem to Wordsworth's own relationship with his wife. More competent answers looked at some of the poetic methods, with many noting the language, 'ethereal and ghostly at times, though also spiritual and religious as well', as one noted. Others explored how his attitude to her changes as he gets to know her better as a 'woman and a wife, though she never loses her magical qualities', as one learner argued. Good answers looked at poetic methods in detail, for example the language and imagery were often well discussed, with good exemplification. Generally, however, there was a lack of precision and confidence when analysing the verse form, the rhymes and the rhythm, which tended to limit the development of the analysis. Learners who made precise reference to the poem and its context to support the analysis of methods often did very well.

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LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/22
Prose and Unseen

Key messages

- Successful responses focus on the writing of the texts and how the writer presents the meaning and content to the reader.
- Successful responses to **(a)** questions use analysis of specific references and quotations to support their points.
- Successful responses to **(b)** passage questions focus securely on detailed analysis of the writing of the selected extract.
- In **Section B: Unseen**, successful responses show how the text type's literary features communicate the meaning and contribute to the reader's understanding of the passage or poem.
- Responses which rely on summary of the content of the set texts or unseen extracts are not successful.

General comments

The March examination paper prompted responses to questions on all of the set texts, though *Stories of Ourselves, Volume 1* was the least studied. Most essays showed the candidates' knowledge of the content of the novels and short stories, and many demonstrated some competence in exploring some of the ways in which writers communicate their concerns through their choices of language, form and structure. The key phrases in questions are prompts such as 'presentation' and 'ways in which'. These should direct candidates to pay close attention to the writing of the texts and how the writers shape their meaning for the reader. This means that candidates need some analysis of specific episodes from the texts to support their answers to **(a)** questions. Writing generally about the characters and plot will not be successful. The passage-based **(b)** questions require very close commentary on the part of the text provided on the question paper, which means a good grounding in prose narrative technique is needed.

For **Section B: Unseen**, candidates need a wide prior experience of the key features of poetry, prose and drama texts from different historical periods. This will allow them to respond to the text types which are presented to them on the question paper and analyse them accordingly.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Prose

Question 1

Kiran Desai: *The Inheritance of Loss*

(a) Not many candidates responded to the question on Father Booty and Uncle Potty, but those who chose it showed capable knowledge of the characters and the novel. While responses did not explore Desai's implications that the two men are in a relationship, they considered the Swiss dairy and the ways in which the characters represent European values transplanted to an unlikely environment. Some answers focused on the accidental discovery that Father Booty is in fact an illegal immigrant and compared his situation with that of Biju in America. Answers would have been improved with greater specific knowledge of the text, as not many essays were supported with direct references to key episodes in the novel.

(b) The passage was the more popular option. Generally, candidates wrote well about parental expectations and parents' methods of getting the best out of their children, often supported with personal reflection. However, these discussions tended to take place at some distance from the

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writing of the passage. Few candidates followed the direction to 'comment closely' on Desai's writing, concentrating on the content with occasional references. One image that did tend to feature was Jemubhai's mother described as 'a phantom'. There were some interesting comments on her ghostly and insubstantial female presence, but answers overlooked that the episode takes place in the pre-dawn 'dark courtyard', so missed that she can hardly be seen. This meant that essays frequently omitted references to the other ways in which Desai creates the atmosphere of the unearthly early hour at which 'Jemubhai's mother shook him awake'. While some referred to the privileges described in ll.16-21, there was little analysis of language and metaphor. Similarly, his father's ambitions in the final paragraph were sometimes mentioned, but little analysis of internal thought, repetition, contrasts, language and structure.

Question 2

Ian McEwan: *Atonement*

(a) This was the less popular choice and the candidates who chose it struggled to respond directly to the question set. Most answers consisted of narrative summary of the entire novel's events, sometimes with occasional references to time. The few who shaped their responses more fruitfully noted the different time settings of the novel's sections, moving from pre-war, through war to post-war, and noted the importance of Briony's older retrospection at the ending of the novel. As *Atonement* is a novel which moves through historical time, involves so much memory, retrospection and a crucial attempt to alter the past, it was surprising that the question was not more popular and handled more confidently.

(b) Essays often discussed the mood and atmosphere of the passage soundly, considering its mood of peace and tranquillity. Candidates often wrote about the easy and friendly relationship between Briony and Robbie here, with the 'swimming lesson' and Briony 'holding his hand'. Some responses drew out the ironies and compared the easy familiarity here with her accusation that Robbie is a sex maniac elsewhere in the novel. Similarly, there were comments that Robbie's time teaching 'at a religious school' in France is a very different experience from his time in France during the war. As found with other **(b)** questions this session, candidates tended to focus on the content of the passage and made useful links with other parts of the novel, but neglected to 'comment closely' on 'McEwan's presentation'. A few answers were able to place this passage within Robbie's reminiscences during his wartime retreat to Dunkirk, but there was little awareness in the responses that this is Briony's invented narration from Robbie's perspective.

Question 3

Stories of Ourselves Volume 1

(a) There were no responses to this question.

(b) There were very few responses to this question. The answers showed awareness of the pressures of living space in *Billennium*, with some reference to the passage. The opening paragraphs of description were mentioned, for example, with occasional words picked out, but without consideration of Ballard's use of data and details drawn from contemporary developments. Essays seldom sustained close attention to Ballard's writing and missed the contribution the dialogue makes to this opening picture in the second half of the extract. The dialogue has a crucial role in demonstrating the human effects of the dystopian developments of the first two paragraphs. This created opportunities for discussion of structure, though these opportunities were seldom taken.

Question 4

Mark Twain: *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

(a) Candidates who chose this question were aware of the importance of the raft in the novel. There was some sound discussion of how the raft represents freedom from the pressure of civilised society for Huck and Jim. However, the focus on the attractions of life on the raft was less clear, many candidates preferring to relate some of the events and characters Jim and Huck encounter. There were long accounts of episodes such as the Grangerfords, for example, which had little direct relevance to the question. Similarly, lengthy discussion of Huck's developing maturity on the raft needed more careful application to the question of the raft's attractions.

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(b) Most answers demonstrated an awareness of the context of the passage and gave clear accounts of its contents. Candidates appreciated Huck and Jim's care of Tom, though not always with close attention to how it is presented, as required by the question. Jim's dialogue, for example, would have repaid closer attention. There could have been more focus on Twain's presentation of Huck's narrative voice and the clarity of 'me and Jim was consulting' separate from Tom. Details such as this could have been developed into a discussion of ways in which Twain presents Huck and Jim working together in a trusting partnership to override Tom and care for him. Most candidates appreciated that Jim puts himself in danger to look after Tom and recognised that Huck shows maturity and judgement in this episode, while Tom has not changed at all.

Section B: Unseen

Question 5 – Poetry

Successful answers on unseen poems tend to begin with an overview which clarifies the candidate's overall understanding of the content and direction of the verse. Most candidates who chose this poem showed some understanding of its meaning, but several candidates struggled with clear comprehension, with discussions of relationships and caste (a misreading of 'Cast' in l.4). Some essays demonstrated thoughtful explanation of the appropriateness of 'shadows' as a metaphor for 'pleasures', considering their common insubstantiality and ephemerality. Those who focused on language picked up the transitory nature of pleasures in such phrases as 'vanish fast', 'in a flash' and 'sudden as it flies'. Essays also featured some discussion of structure, noting that the poem opens with rhetorical questions, develops with observations in the second stanza and directs with imperatives in the final stanza. There was some confusion about rhyme scheme, with not all candidates recognising half rhymes, but few candidates were able to make telling comments about the effects of rhyme. There were more successful comments on the forcefulness of the stanzas' terminal couplets. However, the final couplet, with its central idea of overcoming the transitory nature of pleasures by holding them 'in the heart', surprisingly received limited attention despite being the climax of the poem.

Question 6 – Drama

Most candidates attempting this question grasped something of the relationship between the two characters in the passage, with the superior master, Godspeak, in fact being directed and controlled by his servant Alaba. Some essays recognised the importance of the stage directions and noted the contrast between Godspeak's '*furiously*' and Alaba's '*calmly*' to show the servant's control. Those who paid attention to the dialogue also noted that Godspeak never acknowledges Alaba's suggestions, claiming credit for himself with lines such as 'Wasn't that a brilliant idea of mine?' Few, though, looked closely enough to acknowledge the sequence of Alaba's instructions and corrections which increase through the passage, preferring general comment rather than detailed examination. Some attention was paid to differences in the two characters' language, which indicate their difference in education and class. However, some candidates saw Alaba's expression as childish rather the writer employing indigenous vernacular English. Some essays showed a sound appreciation of the passage as a dramatic text, looking at the stage directions and writing about stage action, particularly Godspeak's frenetic activity.

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LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/32
Shakespeare and Drama

Key messages

- Candidates need to be aware of – and write about – the particulars of these texts as plays, as works designed to be seen on a stage, not read in a classroom.
- Successful responses to **(b)** passage questions focus securely on analysis of the writing in the selected extract in great detail.
- Candidates should be reminded of the difference between background information and context.

General comments

For 9695/32, the March session has a very small number of candidates. It follows, therefore, that the comments below are based on a relatively limited number of responses which might not reflect the full range of the mark scheme.

Teachers and candidates should remember that candidates need to be very confident with their knowledge of texts in **(a)** questions. They need to support their argument with analysis of specific moments from the play to support their answers. In the mark scheme, Assessment Objective 2 (Analysis) includes 'analysis of ways in which writers' choices shape meaning and create effects', and this can only be rewarded if candidates use specific references and quotations that will substantiate the case being made. It is important that a candidate keeps the question as the focus of their argument throughout. There were some cases in this session where candidates did not specifically respond to the question that they had been asked. Some candidates produced answers of great length that would have been much improved had they been shorter and more relevant. In the mark scheme, Assessment Objective 1 (Knowledge and Understanding) calls for an ability to select and structure relevant material, and this is vital if a candidate is to gain access to the top levels of marks available.

When answering **(b)** questions, candidates must be careful to respond closely to the given passage. In particular, it is often useful to write about the stage directions as a means to demonstrate an understanding of how the writer intends a scene to be played. However, an important element of AO1 is to make wider reference to the rest of the text. Some candidates writing about Athol Fugard's *The Train Driver and Other Plays* wrote about the passage with great acuity, but then made no wider reference, thus failing to demonstrate knowledge of the whole text (in this case, three plays) which comprise the 'text' as set for examination. Explorations of the wider text do not have to be extensive; successful candidates often use a comparison or contrast from the wider text to elucidate an element which is important in the passage.

This session's scripts showed a growing awareness of how candidates might use critics to help them develop an argument (Assessment Objective 5 (Evaluation of opinion)). Weaker candidates may provide a simple list of others' views. The best candidates understand that someone else's views, or reference to a production/film that they have seen can help them express their own response more clearly or show how their response has been changed or modified by seeing things in a slightly different way. At its best, this is anchored into particular critics, but it is also possible to make some useful comment with phrases such as 'another way of interpreting this might be ...' Candidates should be wary of talking about general schools of thought (feminism, Marxism, Freudianism, etc.) to make a very generalised comment. The same is true of some aspects of context. A response which makes mention of Brechtian techniques in a play would be much improved by specific location and exploration of those techniques and the various ways in which they impact the audience. Marks are awarded for showing understanding of the terminology, when candidates move beyond the ability to simply name it.

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When writing about the opinions of others, candidates can put forward a critic's view without naming the critic; on the other hand, it is unwise to name a critic and then ascribe some views that the actual person cannot possibly have held. A C Bradley is unlikely – he died in the 1930s – to have commented on *An Experiment with an Air Pump*.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Shakespeare

Question 1

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Hamlet*

(a) This question was answered by a small number of candidates. Most of them focussed on Ophelia's relationship with Hamlet rather than on the question which was about Ophelia's relationship with her father. Better answers argued that Polonius exploits his daughter mercilessly for his own ends and is an agent in her suicide. There were some discussions of Laertes' and Ophelia's relationship with Polonius for purposes of contrast and as a means of raising questions about the restrictions and expectations placed on women at the time.

(b) Very few candidates wrote about the structure of the scene in this passage, which was from Act 4, Scene 4. Most candidates saw the soliloquy and made this the central focus of their response. More successful responses saw the earlier section as vital in that it establishes Hamlet's thoughts about himself as passive and reactive, unlike Fortinbras who is a man of action. It is the final 'spur' for Hamlet's 'dull revenge'. It also builds Hamlet's feeling that he has a great cause if it is worthwhile for others to bring armies to fight a 'little patch of ground/That hath in it no profit but the name.' Some candidates astutely argued that there is an irony in Hamlet's reaction because his space-filling soliloquy in itself demonstrates his willingness to prevaricate.

Question 2

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *The Merchant of Venice*

(a) Answers were quick to explore the most obvious examples of deception – Portia's disguise and the way that the caskets fool the suitors. Few candidates discussed Bassanio's faking of wealth and position, or Portia's testing of the lovers with the ring in order to ensure that they had sterling virtues. Discussions were often rather theoretical, with not enough close analysis of particular moments in the play. There was some useful discussion of how Portia, in disguise and talking as a man is able to have an agency that was not permitted to women at the time.

(b) Candidates warmed quickly to this task, which was to analyse a passage from Act 4, Scene 1 of the play. Most were able to argue that it is, in a sense, the culmination of the play's action. There was much discussion of the cruelty of the Christians who unite against Shylock. At the same time, candidates were also keen to argue that the thwarting of Shylock's own cruelty shows that he is repaid in the same terms he was willing to instigate for others. There was much useful contextual work on the treatment of Jews at the time the play was written. Only the best candidates were really able to engage with the full richness of the language of the scene, noting the harshness of Portia's vocabulary with its continuing taunt of 'Jew', and her complete dominance of the scene. One or two responses suggested that she is at her strongest but least likeable in this scene. There were some interesting discussions of how Portia's disguise enables her to speak in a way that would have been completely unacceptable for a woman at the time.

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Section B: Drama

Question 3

ATHOL FUGARD: *The Train Driver and Other Plays*

(a) Too few responses to comment.

(b) Candidates were asked to analyse a passage from *The Train Driver*, Scene 3. The best answers on this question were able to explore Roelf's overwhelming feelings of guilt and sorrow, both here and elsewhere in the play. There was often useful discussion about Fugard's use of stage directions as a means of directing our response, particularly with reference to his 'deranged behaviour'. Some candidates commented on the brusqueness of Roelf's language and his impatience with Simon. There was also discussion of how Simon's attitude to death is different to Roelf's. The main limitation to some of these answers was a failure to make comparisons with the other two plays that had been set for study: *Coming Home* and *Have You Seen Us?*

Question 4

EUGENE O'NEILL: *Long Day's Journey Into Night*

March 2024 was the first assessment for this text. With both the **(a)** and the **(b)** question, candidates sometimes gave accounts of O'Neill's life. Although this context could be useful and relevant, as the play is so obviously autobiographical, it must not dominate. Candidates are being asked to write about the play as a realised work of art. There is no requirement for a discussion about the play's genesis and the process of its composition.

(a) Candidates were able to explore James Tyrone as dominating his sons – self-opinionated and arrogant as he is. Many candidates also noted, however, that he shares his concerns about his wife with them, revealing vulnerability at times. There was much discussion of how the two sons have started to resemble their father in terms of attitudes and, indeed, addictions.

(b) The best answers were able to make use of the stage directions (abundantly present) as well as what the characters actually say to make their points about this passage from Act 3 of the play. There was often discussion of Mary's loneliness, of her tolerance and indulgence of her completely dysfunctional family, as she encourages them to drink still more. Surprisingly, few candidates commented on the significance of Mary's reference to her dead baby, even though it is one of the drivers of her sadness and addiction as well as being central to the action of the play as a whole. There was some useful discussion at times of how the male characters react to Mary's illness ('what they see fulfils their worst expectations').

Question 5

SHELAGH STEPHENSON: *An Experiment with an Air Pump*

(a) Candidates were able to explore the significance of Joseph Wright's picture for the play and see that many of the characters (particularly Isobel) are part of an active scientific experiment about human behaviour. There were useful comments on the structure of the play and the fact that the action in both eras focuses very clearly on the ethics and practice of scientific experimentation. There was much useful comment on the roles played by Tom and Phil and by Fenwick's daughters to interrogate and question the assertions about experimentation that are put forward by Fenwick and Ellen.

(b) Candidates were free to choose their own focus in this question, which asked candidates to analyse an extract from Act 2, Scene 3. Some chose to focus on the relationship between Fenwick and Susannah; others focused more on Susannah and her frustrations. There was much discussion of the place of women in 18th century society, often linked to the modern section of the play and thus providing the connections to the wider text required by the mark scheme (AO1).

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LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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

Key messages

- Personal response should be supported and developed with focus on the question set.
- Coherent literary argument is reliant on addressing the assessment objectives and ensuring progression of ideas with valid supporting detail.
- When evaluating varying opinions and interpretations, ensure comments align with the focus of the question and reflect a relevant engagement with opinions and critical ideas.

General comments

This was a small entry and not all texts were seen in answers during the course of marking. The most popular texts were *Pride and Prejudice*, *Beloved*, *Leaves of Grass* and *Wide Sargasso Sea.* Answers to these texts, therefore, form the basis of this report.

Responses this series demonstrated candidates' enjoyment of the texts and, for the most part, demonstrated effective and purposeful engagement with the demands of the paper. There was no evidence in this series of rubric infringement. It was clear that most candidates had comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the texts at different ability levels and were well prepared for the questions. The majority of candidates chose to answer on **(b)** questions but some creditable responses to **(a)** options were seen. Context was applied to arguments with more relevance this series, with some interesting discussion of American expansion, 'wanderlust' and ideas about the American Civil War in Whitman's poetry and aspects of Regency society in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, there was some interesting reference to Rhys's decision to 'place her narrative after the Emancipation Act'.

Quality of argument is a factor related to all assessment objectives, including knowledge (via selection of details chosen), understanding, analysis, communication of ideas and personal response. The best answers make convincing arguments in line with the question set and set out to confidently demonstrate their thesis statements. It is important that candidates have an opinion and deliver their views through a critical and robustly-supported lens. In less successful responses, arguments sometimes lack momentum and sense of direction. It is worth candidates thinking about the scope and direction of their argument during the planning process and cross checking that they are on track as the answer develops.

In **(b)** questions, it is essential to use the extract provided and to contextualise it within the wider text, keeping the question in clear view. Some candidates use the extract largely as a means of launching ideas about the text as a whole. While this can work to a certain extent, it can also lead to generalisation, reliance on narration and description. Some good answers were seen to Walt Whitman's poetry this series with the b) question based on an extract from 'Pioneers! O Pioneers!'. One drew out references to 'lovers', 'daughters', 'pageants' and 'minstrels' to highlight Whitman's holistic vision through the theme of collectivism. Another answer effectively explored the use of anaphora in the poem and the effect of musicality here and across the collection. A less successful answer commented on Whitman's use of repetition but did not exemplify this from the extract or comment on the effect. General comments about appealing to readers and 'making them think' are unhelpful in creating a detailed and progressive argument. There was some thoughtful and responsive engagement with the **(b)** question on *Wide Sargasso Sea* with one candidate commenting that, in this extract, what is significant is Antoinette's almost enforced silence and the separation between truth and 'town talk' as representing a shift in attitudes to the family. There was some effective exploration of the use of first-person perspective relating to a sense of powerlessness both here and in the wider text, leading to the narrative choice to also silence Antoinette's brother.

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Candidates perform best when they understand that texts are constructs designed by writers to create particular effects and exemplify ideas and feelings, reflecting features such as history and political influences. Where candidates treat characters as if they are real people, both analysis and personal response can be compromised. Some answers were seen where personal response drove the argument in a general manner with a lack of support and development. For example, in an answer on Beloved, the candidate wrote in general about Sethe's guilt with little reference to supporting detail or exploration of Toni Morrison's methods. A better personal response on *Pride and Prejudice* considered that readers would not be surprised at the lack of love in Charlotte Lucas's marriage, referring to textual detail that she was not 'romantic' and simply wanted a 'comfortable home' as support for this view. Candidates working at Level 4 and above demonstrate insight in personal responses with a view of how aspects of a writer's work appeal to the readership. One example of this is in an answer to the **(a)** question on Pride and Prejudice. The candidate considered how Austen manipulates readers' responses to the relationship between Elizabeth and Darcy in different parts of the novel as a means of developing views on marriage in contrast to other couples, and in the light of social and historical context. Personal engagement with these examples was clear and focused.

Answers to **(a)** questions were most successful when carefully planned and focused. Where the **(a)** question has a stimulus quotation, candidates who incorporate this into their argument tend to develop specific answers that meet the terms of the assessment objectives. For example, in **1(a)**, *Pride and Prejudice*, where the question required a discussion of the ways in which 'Austen presents marriage as more about money than love', the given quotation was used effectively by candidates working at Level 4 and above, leading to some interesting contrasts of relationships. Some candidates working towards the lower end of Level 3 and below tended to try to cover too much ground and often lacked a strategic approach to planning and progression of argument. Some became confused or reliant on narrative. One answer suggested that the Bennets had more wealth but less money without clarification and asserted that 'money never brings what behaviour does'. Better answers selected significant moments in the text to exemplify the points they wished to make. An example of this approach was seen in one answer to **11(a)** on *Wide Sargasso Sea* that used references to Antoinette's husband teaching her about England and lust as a way in which he controlled her emotions and how this was linked to wider physical control of imprisonment and deprivation. The best answers integrated apt textual reference with clarity and perception, some making original use of this detail to articulate relevant and imaginative arguments.

This series candidates continued to improve responses to the AO5 element of the mark scheme with a range of attempts to consider and evaluate other interpretations and opinions. Critical views were presented in a more streamlined manner this series with quotations and references to critics proving increasingly relevant. Candidates working at Level 4 and above dealt well with the demands of the assessment objective. There was some very conscientious and relevant reference to critical views in responses to Walt Whitman, for example, referring to Langston Hughes with his view of Whitman linking the 'personal and intimate' to the 'vast and universal'. Another candidate referred to George Kateb's view of Whitman as the 'greatest philosopher of the culture of democracy' as a starting point for arguments about American identity and priorities in the given poem and wider collection. The range of critical sources in the best answers was impressive and reflected a high level of study and critical awareness. One perceptive use of critical view was seen in a response on *Beloved* with reference to the critic, Judy Simmons, exploring the ways in which the history of slavery and black heritage is 'observed by white historians'. One example of a less successful approach included general reflections on what Whitman's intention may have been, without development or rationale. It is acceptable to build awareness of differing views and interpretations through use of 'on the one hand' and 'on the other hand' or by using constructions such as 'the writer may have meant this', but points must be relevant and supported to meet the criteria for the higher levels of achievement.

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