

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 8695/21
Writing

Key messages

When reading the questions, candidates should concentrate on the prescribed instructions and focus within each question. For example, in **Question 1** the key instruction is to 'write the opening of a story' and the key focus is 'drama and suspense'. In **Question 6** the key instruction is to 'write the script of a voiceover' and the key areas of focus are to 'offer advice and guidance' and to create a 'sense of fun and enthusiasm'. To ensure that candidates do fully understand the key requirements of each question, it may be helpful to underline key words within the question. As part of their exam preparation, it may also be beneficial to give practice to pupils in highlighting significant words/phrases in questions from past papers to help them to focus on what they are being asked to produce.

Within the time limits of the exam, candidates should be prepared to spend a few minutes thinking about, and writing out, a short plan to ensure their response has a sound and effective structure. Planning should help candidates to structure their writing as well as to sustain and develop it into a coherent, cohesive, shaped response. For **Section B** responses in particular, a paragraph plan is advised.

Candidates must understand the importance in this exam of writing in clear, properly punctuated English, with accurate sentence demarcation. Expressing ideas clearly in simple and compound sentences, even without much variety, is preferable to expression in long, rambling sentences that do not flow easily. Often weaker candidates lose control of grammar when they attempt to write in long complex sentences.

In preparing for **Section A**: Imaginative writing, candidates should develop skills in sustaining narratives in the tense they start out with, and safeguard against confusion of tense forms. Candidates should differentiate between 'showing' versus 'telling', to improve descriptive and narrative skills. Candidates must demonstrate their ability to make the reader feel as if they are in the world created in their narrative, and seek to utilise a broad range of effects in their work.

When preparing for **Section B**: Writing for an audience, candidates should be encouraged to read a wide variety of newspaper and magazine articles, both print and online, as background preparation. Candidates should be exposed to the tone, register and format of magazine articles and newspaper correspondence.

General comments

A number of submissions self-penalised on the grounds of rubric infringement: some essays were appreciably short of the minimum word limit. Candidates should practise writing time-limited tasks to a specific word length. Some candidates recorded their word count for each response incorrectly. Examiners will perform their own check on the length of responses, which should fulfil the rubric requirements outlined on the paper.

In **Section A, Question 1** was easily the most popular, followed by **Questions 2** and **3**. There was sometimes a tendency to write stories in **Question 3**, when descriptive writing was required. Some who did write descriptive pieces loaded sentences and phrases with excessive and inappropriate adjectives. For **Section A**, strong responses were those with an original flavour and a convincing sense of place, character or atmosphere: for example, where the reader was able to relate to the sense of drama and suspense in **Question 1**; see a clear change in outlook and mood of the two diary entries in **Question 2**; or appreciate the descriptions of sounds and movement in **Question 3**. Where some candidates fell down in their imaginative writing, it was often due to lack of structural control (sometimes a complete response was rendered less clear by inadequate paragraphing) or a lack of suitable language devices to create effects. A

number of answers were hampered by tense confusions, especially when attempting to create drama or a sense of time passing in **Question 1**.

In **Section B**, **Question 5** was easily the most popular, followed by **Questions 4** and **6**. The more successful **Section B** answers kept the target audience in mind throughout and adopted language and structural techniques to match that audience. Weaker responses were unable to use the conventions of different forms, establish a mature, credible voice or develop a well thought out, logically organised line of argument.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Imaginative writing

Question 1 – *Hide!*

Candidates were asked to write the opening to a story called *Hide!* They were asked to create a sense of drama and suspense.

This was easily the most popular choice but seemed to pose some candidates a few problems with meeting the rubric: the reason for the protagonist to have to hide sometimes had little to do with what the character had witnessed, although the drama and suspense element was usually attempted to some purpose.

A significant number of candidates chose crime-based stories – kidnap, espionage, organised crime – while others used science fiction-based storylines. Quite a few candidates described fairly ordinary events and failed to capture the interest of the reader, so a sense of drama was consequently lacking. On occasions, the structure of the opening of a story was not fully apparent.

Stronger candidates produced a clear storyline about witnessing an incident that prompted the narrator/protagonist's fear or courage, and this provided a focused sense of drama. Such candidates also created a sense of suspense, since that was typically generated by the possibility of being found. They also successfully evoked the reader's sympathy or empathy.

Weaker candidates wrote rather formulaic narratives with little original thought and little obvious form of a story opening. They sometimes did not reveal engage with the theme of 'hiding' until late on in the answer, typically after the drama of escaping some nasty opponents.

Question 2 – *Contrasting diary entries by a young woman and the same woman in her eighties*

Candidates were asked to write two contrasting diary entries, of 300–450 words each, one by a young woman wondering what her life will be like when she is older and the other by the same woman in her eighties. They were asked to create a sense of the woman's outlook and mood.

Many candidates did manage to create a sense of changed perspective, with the younger version often being optimistic and hopeful; the older version, meanwhile, featuring a sense of disappointment and regret.

Stronger candidates successfully established a credible and sensitive contrast between the two diary entries. Some candidates produced quite imaginative and engaging responses, which often centred on regrets over relationships – stronger answers were written from the ironic detachment that old age often brings, putting these relationships and other events in their diarists' lives into quiet perspective after the overly optimistic hopes of their younger selves.

Weaker candidates often offered straightforward storytelling, with control of tenses proving problematic. Such candidates often simply focused on the woman's expectations for the future, followed by a report on whether or not those expectations had been met, with little contrast in point of view or mood.

Question 3 – *Flying*

Candidates were asked to write a descriptive piece called *Flying*, focusing on colours, sounds and movements.

This was not a very popular choice of question, although it did produce some good responses. A number of candidates chose to respond in unusual ways, such as interpreting the title in a metaphorical way or writing from the perspective of a bird in flight. Such approaches were acceptable but not very successful.

Cambridge International Advanced Subsidiary Level
8695 Language and Literature in English November 2017
Principal Examiner Report for Teachers

Some stronger candidates focused on the transition from day-time to night-time to provide them with an effective structure and wrote some vivid descriptions of the different kinds of life visible below, in a variety of landscapes.

Weaker candidates often merely listed 'colours', 'sounds' and 'movements' or became distracted by adjectives and spent rather too much time, for example, detailing the 'bright blue, enormous, majestic sky'. There seemed to be a number of candidates who felt that fragmented sentences enhanced the descriptive quality of their writing when, in fact, the lack of appropriate sentence demarcation sometimes detracted from the effects which the vocabulary selection was intended to create. Other weak responses often lapsed into narrative, rather than descriptive, writing. Many responses lacked paragraphs or any other apparent form of structure.

Section B: Writing for an audience

Question 4 – Review of a new sports magazine

Candidates were asked to write a review, for their school newsletter, of a new sports magazine aimed at teenagers and young adults.

This question was less popular than Question 5, and the sense of both form and audience were not always certain. Few candidates totally grasped the particular language and structure needed for a review, whether positive or critical. Many answers lacked development and felt too list-like. Most reviews focused on good points; a few offered slightly more balance by including negative comments too.

Stronger candidates structured their reviews clearly, with some effectively deploying subheadings. They gave clear recommendations or criticism; the rare critical reviews were usually the more insightful as they provided clear suggestions as to how the magazine could be improved.

Weaker candidates provided rather plodding lists of the magazine's 'features'. Some of these reviewers were taken aback by the alleged bulky size of the publications, which included far too many different types of sporting activity for their consumption. There was some confusion of the review format, with occasional examples of candidates writing for the new magazine, instead of reviewing it.

Question 5 – Contrasting letters to headteacher about a trip to a museum

Candidates were asked to write two contrasting letters, of 300–450 words each, to their headteacher, providing feedback on a school trip to a museum. They were asked to write one letter from a student who gained from the experience and one from a different student who found the experience less useful.

This was by far the most popular question choice in Section B and it produced a good number of successful responses. The requirement to write two contrasting letters was generally achieved by candidates across the ability range. Most candidates were comfortable with the letter form and adopted an appropriate tone and register – voice was therefore generally well observed through the writing.

The stronger candidates addressed specific reasons for their opinions and centred their observations on a particular type of museum (art and history were the favourites). The stronger candidates wrote two very convincing and contrasting views related to the same experience. There was some good use of imaginative language to recreate, for example, the beautiful paintings and artefacts seen at the museum.

Many weaker candidates tended to give an account of the day's events from two different perspectives, rather than create clear contrast. While most candidates managed to set out the letter format properly, quite a few did not – and this led to some of these responses being in the form of a two-part essay without a clear sense of audience. Others struggled with the nature of the feedback, writing in a tone which was not appropriate for formal feedback to a headteacher.

Question 6 – Voiceover for opening segment of *Goodbye Boredom* TV documentary

Candidates were asked to write the script of a voiceover, aimed at teenagers, for the opening segment of a TV documentary called *Goodbye Boredom*. They were asked to offer advice and guidance and to create a sense of fun and enthusiasm.

Some candidates struggled with the voiceover format, using either pseudo-scripted exchanges or (more often) simply writing an article. Stage directions or descriptions of the TV 'shots' were sometimes used excessively, at times at the expense of the text of the voiceover itself. Some candidates struggled to define what information and material should be in an opening segment of a voiceover.

Stronger candidates did just what the question asked: wrote a voiceover with obvious visual elements briefly described and linked to the words, and included a variety of scenes showing a range of activities, for all ages, to relieve boredom. The sense of audience was well observed in these cases and candidates used well-chosen language to create a sense of fun and enthusiasm.

Weaker candidates were less able to produce a convincing voice, and content typically consisted of a list of possible activities, often with a slightly over-exaggerated and repetitive sense of fun.

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 8695/22
Writing

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attempting to create drama or a sense of time passing in **Question 1**.

In **Section B**, **Question 4** was easily the most popular, followed by **Questions 5** and **6**. The more successful **Section B** answers kept the target audience in mind throughout and adopted language and structural techniques to match that audience. Weaker responses were unable to use the conventions of different forms, establish a mature, credible voice or develop a well thought out, logically organised line of argument.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Imaginative writing

Question 1 – *The Longest Day of My Life*

Candidates were asked to write the opening to a story called *The Longest Day of My Life*. They were asked to create a sense of mood and drama.

This was easily the most popular choice. It posed a challenge by requiring a balance between the creation of some tension and the idea of waiting through some tedious or trying times: in describing ‘boring’ events quite a few candidates failed to capture the interest of the reader, and a sense of drama was consequently lacking. In some cases, the first person narrative form suggested by the title became a third person account, thereby compromising structure and cohesion. Many candidates apparently wrote from their own experience (for example, an account of a memorial day for a deceased grandparent) or perhaps one not too remote to them in experiential terms, such as a car breakdown during a family holiday. When such an approach successfully created a sense of drama and mood, this was a very effective way of answering the question. On occasions, the structure of the opening of a story was not fully apparent.

Stronger candidates focused on creating the mood of the narrator and/or characters, setting them up for our sympathy or empathy as readers, before embroiling them in dramatic situations. These responses invariably included some suspense, especially when the time element was included, and the better ones avoided the slightly clichéd approach of writing the time down minute-by-minute. Some very effective answers had a time cut-off (for example the end of an exam) and we were left wondering what had happened after that point in time.

Weaker candidates typically wrote about rather ordinary, mundane events, often in a school or college setting, with a murder or some other shocking incident occurring in an attempt to create drama. Others focused on a character who did not know what to do with his or her day; frequent references to time or waiting for time to pass were a common feature of these responses.

Question 2 – *Contrasting pieces about living in the countryside and the city*

Candidates were asked to write two contrasting pieces, of 300–450 words each, one about a person living in the countryside, and another about the same person living in a city a year later. They were asked to create a sense of atmosphere and place.

‘Atmosphere and place’ was a challenging direction for some candidates. In most cases, the countryside was seen as a positive environment, against the polluted, noisy and swarming metropolis. However, some candidates inverted this convention quite convincingly (opting for indoor plumbing and modern conveniences over the arduous daily tasks necessary for life in a rural setting).

Some of the stronger candidates drew on personal experiences, often writing vividly and with a lot of convincing sensory language. In some such descriptions, particularly of the country, candidates managed to write quite movingly about their own homes and childhoods.

Weaker candidates ignored the time element altogether and merely listed descriptions of the charms of country life and the frictions of the city. While often addressing the concerns of ‘atmosphere’ and ‘place’, these descriptions often did not really link countryside and city in an engaging sense. In many cases, actual descriptions of places, which would have given a concrete and realistic description of either environment, were ignored, to concentrate solely on the atmosphere.

Question 3 – *An Airport*

Candidates were asked to write a descriptive piece about an airport, focusing on sounds and movements to create a sense of atmosphere.

It was evident in many responses, including some of the most evocative, that an airport lounge was a familiar place for a good number of candidates. This again shows the potential benefit for the candidates of writing from their own experience.

The question enabled candidates to subsume narrative elements successfully within the descriptions without losing the descriptive element altogether. This combination was seen in a lot of the stronger responses, where the physical environment was described, with engaging vignettes of travellers' pleasures and frustrations within the airport. The more successful answers built an effective and directed atmosphere in this fashion, employing the various sounds and movements always seen and heard in airport environments to good purpose. Successful variations on perspective included those of a baggage handler and a trainee pilot, which enabled the reader to vicariously feel their nervous and slightly detached view of the masses of ordinary people swarming around the airport.

Weaker candidates often merely listed 'sounds' and 'movements' or became distracted by adjectives and spent rather too much time, for example, detailing the 'shiny, smooth, enormous, white, tiled floor'. There seemed to be a number of candidates who felt that fragmented sentences enhanced the descriptive quality of their writing when, in fact, the lack of appropriate sentence demarcation sometimes detracted from the effects which the vocabulary selection was intended to create. Other weak responses often lapsed into narrative, rather than descriptive, writing. Many responses lacked paragraphs or any other apparent form of structure.

Section B: Writing for an audience

Question 4 – Magazine article called *Fame – Is it worth it?*

Candidates were asked to write an article for their school magazine called *Fame – Is it worth it?* In the article they were asked to show their interest in this issue.

This question was very popular and generally answered quite effectively. Most candidates managed to write with an appropriate sense of audience, with candidates across all bands attempting to use engaging devices and techniques – direct address, rhetorical questions and anecdotes, for example. This is obviously an area of life about which candidates had plenty of ideas and the form was largely managed successfully.

Although the wording does not specifically call for a balanced argument, most candidates who chose this approach did so with relative success. The overwhelming majority of responses included relevant examples of famous people, almost exclusively in the arenas of music or sport, but some worthy philanthropists and saints were included. Additionally, the trait of philanthropy was sometimes included in the descriptions of singers and athletes to demonstrate the subtleties of their struggle to survive their privileged lifestyles. Candidates usually clearly delineated perceived pros (wealth, ability to set trends, humanitarian ventures) and cons (rampant egotism, materialist culture at the expense of family bonds and friendship, psychological and medical issues) of fame.

Stronger candidates often took this approach, and they also typically gave a nuanced and thoughtful sense of how the unrestrained embrace of fame can also lead to the slippery slope of drug or alcohol abuse: philanthropic gestures were seen as an antidote to the egotistical acceptance of admiration. The most successful responses usually adopted a deliberative approach, appealing to their readership to make up their own minds on the issue.

Weaker candidates gave the clichéd opposition of received adulation against the annoyance of being pursued by paparazzi, without further elaboration. Some responses had a somewhat narrow focus about 'being famous' at school or college, but very few of these answers went beyond the application of the clichés of worldwide fame to a school lifestyle in a limited way.

Question 5 – Contrasting reviews of a new computer game

Candidates were asked to write two reviews for a technology website, of 300–450 words each, of a new computer game. They were asked to write one review praising the game and one criticising it.

The requirement to present two contrasting viewpoints was achieved by candidates across the ability range, but some seemed to overlook the fact that the reviews were intended for a technology website. There was a trend here of some candidates writing with greater accuracy, engagement and conviction than on Section A; their obvious interest in and knowledge of computer gaming was probably the reason for this.

Stronger candidates produced some highly convincing pieces of writing that were sufficiently credible for use on a real website. Form was carefully observed and a lively and relaxed style was employed. Some thoughtful candidates even had a glossary of words and phrases for the computer game-illiterate. Some candidates successfully compared the game to previous editions carrying the same name, thus enabling them to make detailed and engaging commentaries on the merits and demerits of not only the game itself, but also the providers.

Weaker answers, on the other hand, merely listed the technical capabilities, often with overly emphatic punctuation or phrasing (multiple exclamation marks for the positive review, ranting in the negative review). Weaker candidates sometimes did not refer to any specific game and, in some cases, ran out of reasons for or against the game, tending to be rather repetitive in order to meet the minimum word requirement.

Question 6 – Talk about the benefits of taking up a creative or expressive hobby

Candidates were asked to write the text of a talk, to be given by a teacher to students and parents, about the many benefits of taking up a creative or expressive hobby. They were asked to create a sense of passion and enthusiasm.

The conventions of a speech were deployed on most occasions, usually quite successfully. Passion and enthusiasm was usually generated through the sharing, from a personal perspective, of detailed observations about the teacher's enjoyable pursuit of a hobby. This was quite a difficult question for the less able candidates, as they struggled to find a convincing voice for the teacher delivering the talk.

Stronger candidates identified a number of specific benefits to taking up a creative hobby and added specific examples. The most successful candidates clearly conveyed the persona of a thoroughly charismatic teacher, with the benefits chiefly advocated to be a reduction in stress levels, engagement with one's inner artist, the formation of strong and lasting friendships, potential lifelong involvement in an activity, and meaningful connections made between children and their parents.

Weaker candidates tended to be rather vague on the whole, and understanding of what comprised 'The Arts' was often lacking, with few concrete examples provided. They spoke generally about how the arts were creative and, therefore, beneficial, without any detailed reasoning. Often 'parents' (specifically mentioned in the question) were not included, therefore cutting off one obvious choice of encouragement, whether through supporting their offspring with money to buy materials or sharing the passion/enthusiasm themselves.

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 8695/23
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Key messages

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inadequate paragraphing) or a lack of suitable language devices to create effects. A number of answers were hampered by tense confusions, especially when attempting to create drama or a sense of time passing in **Question 1**.

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Comments on Specific Questions

Section A: Imaginative writing

Question 1 – As she approached the house, she was sure she saw a face in the upstairs window

Candidates were asked to write a story beginning with the given sentence, *As she approached the house, she was sure she saw a face in the upstairs window*. They were asked to create a sense of drama and mystery.

This was the most popular choice, and produced some highly imaginative responses. Some candidates, however, mistakenly interpreted that the instruction meant that they should write only the opening of a story. Such responses were consequently incomplete, with too many ending on what the candidate felt was an acceptable 'cliff-hanger'; to the reader, meanwhile, it felt like a poor, unsatisfactory conclusion. Many of the candidates wrote in the horror genre.

Stronger candidates produced a clear storyline, with drama and mystery often being created by the unknown face in the upstairs window. This often focused the narrator/protagonist's fear or courage, which provided a sense of drama. Other candidates incorporated creepily normal conversations with an obvious ghostly presence into their stories, or introduced weird, time-warp situations which plummeted the narrator/protagonist into an impossible past or future, thus fulfilling the 'mystery' element of the question.

Weaker candidates wrote rather formulaic narratives with little, or no, clear link with the face in the upstairs window. They often struggled to come up with a convincing conclusion to the story, and this resulted in some rather long pieces of writing which lacked overall structural control.

Question 2 – Contrasting pieces, one from the perspective of a taxi driver and the other from the perspective of the passenger

Candidates were asked to write two contrasting pieces, of 300–450 words each, one from the perspective of a taxi driver driving to the airport, and the other from the perspective of his or her passenger. They were asked to create a sense of outlook and mood. Most candidates attempted to create two different voices, with varying degrees of success.

Stronger candidates subtly linked the driver's and passenger's thoughts about each other or similar people/events seen out of the window, in their separate parts of the vehicle. Narrative drama and suspense were often brought into play with the situation of the passenger rushing to avoid missing their flight. While many of the taxi drivers were grumpy, sometimes their positive or cheerful attitude to their work contrasted nicely with a stressed tourist or jobseeker in the back of the taxi.

Weaker candidates tended to mirror events in both pieces and just switched characters. The differences in outlook and mood were often not very apparent.

Question 3 – The Ocean

Candidates were asked to write a descriptive piece about the ocean, focusing on colours, sounds and movements to create a sense of atmosphere.

This was not a very popular choice of question, although it did produce some good responses. Some responses entailed visits to the beach, which were accepted as instances of oceanic observations.

Stronger candidates wrote some vivid descriptions of the different kinds of life visible below the ocean, successfully creating a sense of atmosphere through the sustained use of the descriptive form in effective

descriptions of marine biology. They structured their answers clearly in a variety of ways, such as writing paragraphs on different marine creatures, or describing from the surface of the ocean down to the depths. Others successfully utilised the viewpoint of a diver, describing the creatures he or she encountered while moving silently through the water.

Weaker candidates often merely listed colours, sounds and movements, or became distracted by adjectives and spent rather too much time, for example, detailing the 'beautiful, deep, blue ocean' or the 'enormous, scary, majestic shark'. Other weak responses often lapsed into narrative, rather than descriptive, writing. Some responses lacked paragraphs or any other apparent form of structure.

Section B: Writing for an audience

Question 4 – Review of the latest book by a well-known author

Candidates were asked to write a review of the latest book by a well-known author, to be published in their school magazine. In the review they were asked to give their opinion of the book and how it compares with the author's previous ones. This question encouraged candidates to talk about their reading enthusiasms and most candidates who opted for it seemed to be keen readers.

Stronger candidates had detailed knowledge of their authors' books, as well as being fully familiar with the style and form of literary reviews. This was clearly evident in the imaginative and engaging responses they produced. Such candidates also spent some time making comparisons with the author's previous texts, often in trilogies or series. This led to most of the best answers talking convincingly about real authors and books.

Weaker candidates sometimes did not seem to have a real book in mind and wrote rather unconvincing reviews, which were often heavily reliant on storytelling, rather than providing the reviewer's opinion of the book.

Question 5 – Contrasting letters about pocket money

Candidates were asked to write two letters, of 300–450 words each, one in favour of giving children pocket money and the other against it.

This was the most popular choice of question in Section B and the requirement to write two contrasting letters was achieved by candidates across the ability range. It produced some interesting arguments for and against pocket money, with some mature and well thought out answers, with developed arguments and thoughtful conclusions.

Stronger candidates produced some highly convincing, contrasting pieces of writing that were fully credible. Form was carefully observed and a lively and passionate style was employed with some quite subtle ideas and arguments about the social, cultural and moral aspects of this topic. Candidates were able to impersonate parents' views quite readily.

Weaker candidates tended to produce short answers which lacked development, often merely listing the pros and cons of giving pocket money. They struggled to differentiate the two voices clearly, and many pieces lacked contrast, instead only presenting conflicting arguments concerning pocket money.

Question 6 – Principal's welcome speech to new students

Candidates were asked to write the text of a speech, to be given by a principal to new students on the first day of the school year. They were asked to create a sense of enthusiasm and motivation for the year ahead.

The conventions of a speech were deployed on most occasions, usually quite successfully. Enthusiasm and motivation was usually generated through the sharing of the activities the students would be involved in during the year ahead. Most candidates successfully employed a convincing voice for the principal delivering the talk and tone, register and form were generally well sustained even in those responses which were technically weak.

Stronger candidates had a mature voice and provided varied reasons for looking forward. They focused on specific aspects of school life, did not pull any punches about the necessity for discipline, and talked frankly about their own experience of being a principal, often reminiscing in a not overly indulgent way about their own memories of adolescence.

Weaker candidates tended to be rather vague and lacked clear focus on the requirements of the speech. They often relied on repetition and exclamation marks to create a sense of enthusiasm while presenting general platitudes about success and following dreams.

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 8695/91
Poetry, Prose and Drama

Key messages

- Questions usually ask candidates to consider ways in which writers treat particular concerns, so successful responses will focus on authors' choices of language and literary methods, and the effects these might have on a reader or audience.
- Questions are about the writing of the texts, so responses which only consider events and characters will not be successful.
- Candidates need to consider the specific wording of **(a)** questions very carefully, choose material that is directly relevant, and shape their answers as a response to that specific question.
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General comments

Examiners were often impressed by the energy and insight of the textual discussion in essays, which frequently demonstrated a detailed knowledge of the set texts and a sensitive appreciation of writers' methods. A pleasing development over the last few series has been the increasing willingness of candidates to explore the detail and effects of the writing of prose passages, with focus on not only language and imagery but sentence and paragraph forms, narrative point of view and tone. On the other hand, this examination series raised many examples of candidates being less careful about their responses to **(a)** questions, with many general, narrative answers, often dealing with the characters as if they were real people, with very little consideration of the writing of the texts. There were also a high number of cases where candidates had not thought carefully enough about the focus of the question and therefore chose material from their texts which was unhelpful for the question set.

Comments on specific questions

1. TED HUGHES: *Selected Poems*

- (a)** There were very few responses to this question and several of the responses looked at setting in very general terms. More successful answers considered the setting specific to the poems they were considering, which ranged from bleak landscape in poems such as 'Crow Hill' and 'Wind', a battlefield in 'Bayonet Charge' or a domestic kitchen in 'Her Husband'. Such essays were able to discuss not only the presentation of the setting but consider how it was used in the poem to inform the subject matter and guide a reader's response.
- (b)** The most successful responses to this question clearly focused on the presentation of the frailty of the crane-fly, as it is struggling against its fate. There were some personal and detailed analyses of structure, form and language in the most effective essays, often thoughtfully considering the range of metaphors and the sympathetic tone which starts with the use of the personal pronoun 'She'. Some essays featured thoughtful comment on the way Hughes' description balances imagination and precise entomological observation. Less cogent answers tended to discuss what the poem might mean using assertion which was seldom supported. This was particularly true of imposed biographical readings which took the insect to be a representative of Sylvia Plath.

2. ELIZABETH JENNINGS: *Selected Poems*

- (a) The very few responses to this question tended to focus more on Jennings' own struggles with mental health than on ways in which her poetry presents illness. While biographical context can be interesting and illuminating it is important to remember that candidates should be primarily concerned with the text itself.
- (b) A large number of essays showed an appreciation of the language and imagery of Jennings' poem and the suggestions of savagery; fewer were able successfully to articulate how the view of 'the savage world' springs from the title of the poem itself. Confident candidates were able to explore the more conventional understanding of savagery in predator animals, like the 'fox' and 'owl', hunting their prey, and considered the connections Jennings creates with that kind of natural urge to sexual urges – another kind of 'blood beat' and 'throb', which also underpins human affection. Human beings too are described as 'creatures', a point grasped in many successful essays.

3. *Songs of Ourselves, Volume 2*

- (a) The difficulties human beings face in relationships were interpreted quite broadly in responses to this question, with a number looking at infidelity in 'The Forsaken Wife' or at separation in 'Amoretti Sonnet 86' or 'Verses Written on her Death-bed'. A number of others looked at racial tension and distrust in 'The White House', 'These Are the Times We Live In' and 'The Migrant'. Some essays described the content and meaning of the poems without considering the ways in which they were communicated; others listed interesting choices of diction and imagery without consideration of how they communicated meaning. Successful answers combined the two approaches, looking carefully at how the poets' choices of language, imagery and form effectively communicate the meaning, affecting the ways readers understand the poems.
- (b) There were many sympathetic responses to Emily Brontë's poem and most answers were able to expound its central meaning successfully. The question and poem demanded a careful examination of how the view of death is carefully developed through the stanzas, but few candidates were able to give the poem a thorough close and precise reading. There was some examination of particular images, the anchoring metaphor in stanza 4 often being a particular focus, but only rarely was this examination part of a developing thesis about the poem.

4. JHUMPA LAHIRI: *The Namesake*

- (a) While the passage question was much more popular, there were a good number of responses to the question about the presentation of family relationships. Most essays focused on the Ganguli family, and the novel certainly provides plenty of material for such a focus. Gogol's changing views of his parents was the strongest focus for candidates, including reference to his change of name and his response to his father's death. However, some candidates ranged more widely, with interesting results. On the one hand, some answers considered the role of the extended Indian family, including the wait for the grandmother's name for the baby, the visits to India and the death of Ashima's father. Also successful were the answers which contrasted traditional Bengali family values with Lahiri's presentation of American families, with Maxine's family the most frequent focus. Such answers were able to look more carefully at Lahiri's arrangement of ideas through the novel and the comparisons and contrasts she creates by her presentation.
- (b) There were many very strong answers to this question, featuring an overview of the importance of this passage's separation of Gogol's and his family's responses to the visit to India, combined with careful and precise analysis of some of the linguistic and narrative features of the passage itself. The difference between his parents' 'distress' while Gogol is 'secretly pleased' was often a starting point of a discussion of ways in which Lahiri's partial third person narrative presents Gogol's perspective and loss of a sense of being 'adventurous' on such a journey, to be replaced by frustration. Key details were picked up, such as Gogol's savouring of airline western food, while he finds the air in Delhi 'stomach-turning'. In contrast, candidates noted Ashima's ease as he 'slips' into a 'fresh sari'. The range of names for different relatives, the transformation of Gogol's parents and the powerless feeling of being 'swallowed' were all of note and many candidates noted Sonia's sharing of Gogol's uncertainty at the end of the extract.

5. EDITH WHARTON: *The House of Mirth*

- (a) Too few responses to make a general comment appropriate.
- (b) Too few responses to make a general comment appropriate.

6. *Stories of Ourselves*

- (a) By some margin, Lim's 'Journey' and Desai's 'Games at Twilight' were the favoured stories chosen by candidates in responses to this question. Among other stories used were Grace's 'Journey', 'The Lemon Orchard', 'Secrets' and 'The Yellow Wall Paper', all to good effect. In some cases, though, essays twisted the question to look at how readers came to realisations, rather than the question's specific focus on characters' realisations. Less successful answers too tended to focus on narrative and on identifying the realisations, rather than considering how those characters are presented and the realisation is made significant in the narrative. More successful responses discussed such techniques as foreshadowing in the gothic dream visions at the beginning of Lim's 'Journey', or contrast, with Ravi's fervent hopes and confidence in the shed compared with the ending of 'Games at Twilight'. There was thoughtful discussion of the interior monologue, establishing key concerns and background, in Grace's 'Journey', and the use of letters and disrupted chronology in 'Secrets'. Candidates who thought carefully about how writers constructed their stories were far more successful than those who restricted their discussion to characters and what happens to them.
- (b) There were a surprising number of candidates who took the character of Mma-Mompoti at face value and extolled the praises of a thoughtful, caring and compassionate woman. This suggested a less than careful reading of the whole story and an imperceptive reading of the passage. Some candidates relied on narrating the events of the entire story rather than focusing on the writing of the passage, while others argued that this passage presents Mma-Mompoti as a caring figure, while the rest of the story reveals her hypocrisy. The candidates who knew the whole story and were also able to pay close focus to the passage itself were able to respond successfully, showing how the narrative in the excerpt develops its ironic portrayal of the character. While she is described as the 'great lady', alert candidates noted the unflattering colonial comparison with an 'English lady, with 'polished etiquette' and the clear implications of pretence in her 'professional smile' and 'assiduously cultivated' image, language choices which suggest effort and exhibition. The passage repaid careful reading and successful answers showed how Head's writing presents not only Mma-Mompoti for criticism, but the villagers too, who accept her view of herself so unquestioningly.

7. AMA ATA AIDOO: *The Dilemma of a Ghost and Anowa*

- (a) Too few responses to make a general comment appropriate.
- (b) The tension between Osam and Badua was recognised by most candidates responding to this question, as they argue about Anowa's future. Most answers showed some clear understanding of the characters' positions and the progress of their argument, but only tentative attempts were made to discuss dramatic methods and effects. There were references to the stage directions indicating Badua's pacing and sticking her fingers in her ears, but little further exploration of the passage as drama. In particular, few candidates commented on the language, structure and effects of the last part of the extract as Badua recites the attributes of priesthood.

8. WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Antony and Cleopatra*

- (a) There were a small number of responses on Octavius Caesar, which were able to demonstrate that he represents the Roman view within the play. His character was generally discussed critically, contrasted with Antony, with few candidates able to explore the ambiguity of Shakespeare's presentation. A small number of responses balanced the cold, efficient aspects of Octavius with his sense of duty, responsibility and skill as a soldier and politician, each aspect of his character explored by Shakespeare in different parts of the play.
- (b) This passage drew some engaged responses. The strongest of these paid attention to the second section of the question, and used the required close reference to language and action to show how Shakespeare shapes the scene to affect an audience's response. The physical action of drawing Antony up into Cleopatra's monument was discussed, coming after the more distant exchange

between him and Cleopatra, with some candidates aware of the potential for slight comedy in the moments before Antony's death. Others commented perceptively on Shakespeare's characterisation of Cleopatra, combining grand sweeps of imagery with urgent self-preservation, while it is her dialogue which dominates the passage. Antony's final vision of himself as 'the greatest prince o' th' world' received comment, as did the hyperbolic nature of Cleopatra's final vision of him in the closing speech. In these shifts of focus, changes and developments of characterisation, successful essays were able to show how Shakespeare shapes an audience's reaction.

9. BRIAN FRIEL: *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*

- (a) Some candidates struggled to identify symbols used in the play, while others used a wide interpretation of symbols. Some saw characters used symbolically, arguing, for example, that the Canon represents the contribution which religion makes to the static quality of Irish society. There was some interesting discussion of the clock and SB's pocket watch, which give visual indications of the play's concern with time's apparent lack of progress in Ballybeg, and the repeated refrain of the song 'Philadelphia Here I Come' itself symbolises Gar's desire to escape. Perhaps the most potent symbol of all discussed in essays was the blue boat, representing a lost childhood and relationship between Gar and his father.
- (b) Most responses to this question made comments about the repetitive nature of life in Ballybeg, focusing on some examples to illustrate 'Not a thing happening'. Successful answers explored the effects of the dramatic device of Private, in highlighting and commenting on the inertia of everyday life in Ballybeg. Friel's use of predictable phrases in the dialogue, illustrating a lack of deep connection between the characters, drew much comment, as did the repeated empty laugh of the Canon, contrasting with the real humour of a supposedly outraged Private as he declares 'Canon O'Byrne!' Strong candidates noted too the fact that Public Gar contributes just one line, demonstrating the nature of the relationship between him and his father, and how an audience should not be fooled by how much Private has to say in the passage. There was some capable discussion of the humour of the passage, which at the same time illustrates the boredom of Ballybeg from which Gar wishes to escape.

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 8695/92
Poetry, Prose and Drama

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Comments on specific questions

1. TED HUGHES: *Selected Poems*

- (a)** The question on conflict offered a number of routes for candidates to explore. Some considered the war poems to good effect whilst others looked at the conflict between humankind and the natural world, while some examined conflict within the natural world. This meant that a wide range of poems were chosen, from 'Bayonet Charge', through 'Thistles' and 'Wind' to 'Pike' and 'Hawk Roosting'. Less successful responses described the conflict represented in their chosen poems, relying on a recall of content rather than discussing poetic presentation. More confident responses looked at Hughes' creation of particular points of view and ways in which the conflict is presented through striking language choices and particular imagery in different poems.
- (b)** 'The Tender Place' proved a very popular choice, though the poem was not always well understood. A sizeable number of answers assumed that it describes torture in warfare, while others, with some knowledge of the context, took the view that Hughes describes watching ECT being performed on Sylvia Plath, or in some cases, inflicting it himself. Many candidates thought that the 'twelve-volt battery' was a part of the therapy itself and several understood 'temples' as places of worship. While some knowledge of the context can be helpful in interpreting the poem, understanding does not depend on it, and the context sometimes became an obstacle with candidates who did not fully understand it. More successful answers were able to explore the language and imagery of the poem effectively, though most were more confident with the first stanza and gave less attention to the second half of the poem. There was some capable discussion

of the violence of vocabulary and imagery, with references to 'grenade', 'thunderbolt', 'lightnings' and 'seizures'. The threatening anonymity of the medical staff was compared with the presentation of the helplessness of their patient, 'in... straps' and feeling 'Terror'. Essays which did engage with the second two stanzas found interesting things to say about the comparisons Hughes makes with the 'burning child' and 'the Boston City grid', while some explored the suggestions about the effects of the therapy on Plath's psychology and poetry in the final lines.

2. ELIZABETH JENNINGS: *Selected Poems*

- (a) Too few responses to make a general comment appropriate.
- (b) Nearly all candidates who had studied Jennings' poetry opted for this question on 'Remembering Fireworks'. Most were able to make some comments on the ways the fireworks themselves are described and suggested that they create childish 'delight' in the onlookers, and some of these looked at the references to light and shape. More developed answers considered not only the 'delight' of fireworks, but their ephemerality, and picked up the ideas of 'nostalgia' and 'things long known and lost' at the centre of the poem. Such answers postulated that the fireworks are also metaphoric, creating 'shapes, signs' but ultimately leaving 'emptiness' and memory only. Some candidates linked this idea with 'fumbling/For words of love' and discussed the transitoriness of human affection, with suggestions in some cases of phallic symbolism in the 'spent rocket'. Some perceptive responses noted that as well as the 'delight' in the fireworks, the poem expresses Jennings' familiar doubt and uncertainty with 'falling', 'absence', 'fumbling' and 'We search for a sign' at the ends of lines.

3. *Songs of Ourselves, Volume 2*

- (a) This was a very popular question, and while 'On My First Daughter' and 'Sons, Departing' was the most common pairing, many kinds of separation and a wide range of poems were considered, including 'Border Builder', 'The Migrant', 'The White House', 'The Forsaken Wife', 'Verses Written on Her Death-bed' and 'Song'. As is often the case with less successful responses to poetry (a) questions, many described the separation, its causes (sometimes imaginatively invented) and effects, without considering at all the ways in which it is presented through language, structure and form. The most successful answers came from candidates who knew their poems very well and could therefore quote from them confidently, to enable them to comment on how tone is created, the effects of particular diction or imagery and so on. In this way, for example, there was some thoughtful discussion of the poem's structure reflecting the stages of the father's grief in 'On My First Daughter' and the symbolism of the hedges and the references to light and dark in 'Sons, Departing'.
- (b) The question on the Pope extract was frequently answered and sometimes excellently, with well-informed, detailed analytical discussion. There were also many candidates, however, who were not confident in their understanding of the poem. Some candidates were unaware that the extract was taken from a longer poem from the 18th century, but in some cases, the awareness of its context led to lengthy discussion of Pope's views on literature and the critics which were not always successfully linked to the extract. Effective responses commented on the allusions to the Pierian Spring and the Muse and some explored the tone of the poem, noting humour in the paradoxical 'shallow draughts intoxicate the brain' while 'drinking largely sobers us again' and the ironic noting that 'fearless youth' meet 'strange surprise' when they seem 'to tread the sky' before discovering further challenges. There was some successful engagement with the imagery of those never-ending challenges as 'Alps on Alps arise', the mountain metaphor suggesting both intimidation and exciting challenges.

4. JHUMPA LAHIRI: *The Namesake*

- (a) It was striking that a large number of the less successful responses to this question merely narrated sections of the plot without direct reference to the question itself. Long accounts of Gogol's early trials at school and his change of name, or his relationship with Maxine, often seemed to have little relevance to 'the relationships between children and their parents'. More thoughtful responses usually started with Gogol's growing detachment from his parents, particularly his father, with Lahiri showing at various points both the conscious and unconscious separation. His name, the gift of the book of short stories and the revelation of the importance of the author Gogol to his father were key parts of this. There was also careful discussion of ways in which Lahiri shows Gogol's return to his mother following his father's death, while comparisons were often

drawn with the characterisation of Sonia. Successful responses often explored the portrayal of Maxine's parents and their role as surrogate parents to Gogol, while there was also thoughtful discussion of Lahiri's presentation of the relationship between Ashoke, Ashima and their parents.

- (b) While there were some narrative responses to this passage, which did not explore Lahiri's writing effectively, there were also many sensitive readings, responsive to the situation itself and the author's presentation of it. Many candidates contextualised the extract to indicate how Lahiri emphasises Ashima's isolation in the house and noted how the first sentence creates the foreboding atmosphere of threat. Some linked that with ll. 44–45 where Ashima floods the house with light in defiance of Ashoke's death. Strong candidates noted the use of the third person narrator which creates suspense for the reader while also leading them to the truth in advance of Ashima herself. There was some observant discussion of the detailed steps Ashima goes through to try to contact her husband, with emphasis on periods of time to build tension. Candidates noted Lahiri's use of direct speech as Ashima tries to call the hospital, her persistence and confidence as she negotiates its systems and gets irritated by the delays. Many commented on the use of the term 'expired', clinically neutral and at first not comprehended. Many candidates noted how Lahiri uses the physical action of Ashima holding down the telephone receiver to indicate her mental state and discussed Lahiri's description of the physical actions of Ashima shivering and turning on all the lights, then staring at the completed cards. Perceptive candidates were able to observe that Lahiri leaves the reader to fill in the gaps and interpret Ashima's emotions.

5. EDITH WHARTON: *The House of Mirth*

- (a) While there were few responses to this question, candidates who attempted it usually had a good understanding of Percy Gryce's character and role. Wharton's emphasising of his wealth and collection of Americana featured strongly in answers, as did the blandness of his characterisation – a dull, unoriginal and nervous man. His role in the novel as a key eligible bachelor in New York society, a target for young women and their mothers, was well understood, and in particular his role initially in being a marriage target for Lily herself. Some very astute answers discussed an ambiguous response to Lily's failure in her resolve to marry him, Wharton encouraging both a disappointment that her behaviour and Bertha Dorset's interference leads to Percy's withdrawal when she seems set for success, but also relief that she has avoided a meaningless, loveless marriage to an exceptionally boring man.
- (b) Less successful responses recounted the events in this extract with occasional comments on how beautiful Lily is and how much Selden appreciates her. A number of candidates did not consider that the responses of the audience of the tableaux are a key part of Wharton's presentation of it and so missed some key points. Stronger responses recognised that Wharton presents the view of Lily's beauty through direct narration as well as through the perspective of Selden, a character whose views are trusted by the reader, and Van Alstyne, who represents the society which the reader recognises to be corrupt. Strong essays often featured detailed discussion of the contrast between the descriptions of Lily and the other women, with the other women's 'sumptuous curves', 'gold salver', rich brocade', black satin' and 'pearl-woven heads' highlighting the 'pale draperies' 'without distracting accessories' which highlight Lily's own 'loveliness' and 'soaring grace'. There was some interesting discussion of ways in which these details show Lily as part of, but distinctly different, from the values of New York society. The use of dialogue was often explored, particularly looking at Wharton's use of Gerty Farish's commentary to delay the appearance of Lily and her effect on the audience and the reader.

6. *Stories of Ourselves*

- (a) Popular stories to compare for this question included Lim's 'Journey', 'Secrets', 'The Yellow Wall Paper', 'Games at Twilight', 'Meteor' and 'The Lemon Orchard'; successful responses went further than identifying the important discoveries and looked at ways in which the structure and writing of the stories shapes the characters' and reader's responses to them. Some interesting answers looked at the use of foreshadowing, in the dismal setting of the shed in 'Games at Twilight' and the macabre dream sequence in 'Journey', for example; while good responses on 'The Yellow Wall Paper' looked at the gradual development of the discovery. Some interesting responses on 'Meteor' contrasted the discoveries made by the aliens and the reader with the lack of discovery made by the human beings in the story. Successful answers depended on detailed knowledge of the chosen stories with the ability to quote from them to support key points in the argument.

- (b) While there were some responses which saw the relationship of Royal and his wife as comfortable, loving and mutually supporting, most answers were more perceptive and recognised that underneath that surface, White presents Royal as an aggressive, stifling partner to his wife. A significant number also picked up on the details which suggest Royal's diminished power and also that the inclusion of Ella's thoughts within the narrative indicate that she retains an inner life which Royal has not quite crushed. The passage repaid close attention and candidates commented fruitfully on Royal's name and his wife's anonymity in the passage, contrasting his wheelchair with the 'old cane chair' which is no longer 'presentable'. Candidates noted that the apparent equality of 'side by side' is undermined by Royal's speeches, gruff and accusatory with short sentences. Many identified gender inequality and the patriarchal society as a key concern in the passage and the story as a whole, though some subtler responses commented on the woman's dependency and affection – White writes that 'she liked' listening to Royal, notes her patience with him and her acknowledgement that 'She didn't know what she would do if Royal passed first'. The writer's use of metaphor was often discussed considering the idea of life passing the couple by as they sit and watch the traffic. Candidates who used their knowledge of the whole story were able to comment about the importance of the man in the pink car to develop the discussion of that part of the passage.

7. AMA ATA AIDOO: *The Dilemma of a Ghost and Anowa*

- (a) There were very few responses to this question, showing some knowledge of the two plays. Candidates concentrated on the female characters and looked at issues of gender and patriarchy and some considered ways in which Ato's sense of his society is challenged by Eulalie, for example.
- (b) Few candidates responded to this text, but most who did attempted the passage question. It is important for candidates to note the nature of passage-based questions, as here few noted the second half of the question, recommending close reference to language and action. It would have been useful, for example, to comment on the significance of Anowa's costume and discuss the mirroring effect of the actions of the Boy and Girl, though some answers were able to discuss Anowa's speech about woman- and motherhood.

8. WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Antony and Cleopatra*

- (a) This question on some of the central concerns of the play drew some thoughtful and knowledgeable responses, with many candidates able to articulate some of the methods Shakespeare uses to dramatise Roman and Egyptian values. These ranged from the characterisation of Antony and Caesar to aspects such as the two rivers, the Nile associated with agriculture and fertility, whereas the Tiber is linked with naval warfare and military strategy. Octavia and Cleopatra were often compared and contrasted with telling choices of detail. A few subtle responses noted that the contrasts are highlighted by ambiguities and conflicts within characters, especially Antony, who while at one point is struck by 'a Roman thought', in another acknowledges that his 'pleasure lies' in the 'East'.
- (b) While this was quite a popular passage, a number of candidates struggled to focus specifically on the question and did not successfully pay attention to the presentation of politics. The successful responses analysed the scene's political negotiation, with neither Caesar nor Antony committing themselves and allowing Agrippa to take the role of go-between, and still testing each other out once Agrippa has made his proposal. Some noted Antony's political calm when he turns aside Caesar's barb about Cleopatra with dignity, but that he still falls into a political trap by agreeing to the marriage with Octavia. Many candidates discussed the role of Caesar's sister as a political pawn, used by her brother who frankly admits his power over her in ll. 29–30. Further to this, some answers, alert to detail, noted the ironic language used by Caesar in confirming the agreement in ll. 40–44, where he refers to Octavia's role to 'join our kingdoms', whereas the implications of 'bequeath' suggest the political reality. Some noted too the role of Lepidus, apparently an equal holder of political power with Caesar and Antony, but who says little and nothing until the negotiation has been completed.

9. BRIAN FRIEL: *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*

- (a) Few candidates responded to this question. All who did so recognised the importance of the Sweeneys in representing the prosperous life in America to which Gar aspires and to Lizzy's role in encouraging him to emigrate with promises of accommodation and a job. The flashback scene of

the Sweeneys' visit was a central reference, with some noting that although Lizzy Sweeny is the source of Gar's desire to leave, she is also presented as a shallow, superficial character.

- (b)** This episode, dominated by Private Gar's speeches, was the favoured option, with many answers noting both the humour and underlying pathos. Some successful responses demonstrated a clear grasp of the presentation of Gar's subconscious thoughts and desires through Private while Public retires to his bedroom. Comments were made on the contrast between Private's entertaining and histrionic speeches and the quiet dull game being played by SB and the Canon. They explored how the sarcasm and taunts directed towards the two men relate to earlier events in the play and some also made reference to the *mise-en-scene* and the importance of the bedroom as a refuge. There was often appropriate focus on the underlying emotion behind 'will you miss me?'

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Comments on specific questions

1. TED HUGHES: *Selected Poems*

- (a)** Few candidates responded to this question and of those who did, several omitted to consider landscape in Hughes poetry, which was the focus, and instead wrote about animals. It is very important that candidates think carefully about the wording and focus of questions and choose their material judiciously to ensure appropriateness. Some answers made gestures towards the question, for example that the landscape is the sky in 'Skylarks' or 'Hawk Roosting'. This was inventive, but not successful. Successful answers were confident in what constituted landscape and wrote well about the presentation of the 'oozing craters' of farmland in 'Crow Hill', the 'tent of the hills' in 'Wind', ice forming 'plate and rivet on pond and brook' in 'October Dawn' or the 'Smudged' farms and fields in 'November', for example.
- (b)** 'The Thought-Fox', on the other hand, drew a large number of responses, many of them sensitive, perceptive and responsive to Hughes' choices of language and imagery. The imaginary fox as a metaphor for poetic inspiration was well understood and its tentative introduction into the poem carefully plotted. The most successful essays considered not just the emergence of the fox but ways in which the poem makes the connection between it and creation in stanzas 3–5. Candidates traced the way in which the fox's 'nose touches twig, leaf' to detect scent as suggesting that creation is hesitant and instinctive, and most candidates interpreted ll. 11–12 as placing words on the page, noting the neat repetition of 'now'. They considered ll. 14–15 as the writer obliquely finding words which sidle into view, becoming focused and clearer as if having a life of their own

(‘coming about its own business’), as if independent of the poet. Nearly all candidates acknowledged the ‘sudden sharp hot stink’ of the fox as a powerful metaphor, suggesting that words have a taste and smell of their own and enter the poet’s mind without him being conscious of the process. Several paid close attention to the role of the clock marking time, the initial absence of a guiding ‘star’ and the contrast between the ‘blank page’ in stanza 1 and the final line of the poem.

2. ELIZABETH JENNINGS: *Selected Poems*

- (a) There were a very few answers to this question. Among the answers, ‘Night Sister’, ‘A Mental Hospital Sitting-Room’ and ‘Night Garden’ were the poems chosen for focus. These were appropriate poems, though they were not always known in sufficient detail to support an argument and some answers drifted from the question’s focus on medical care to discuss illness more generally, while some were waylaid by recounting Jennings’ biography, which was seldom helpful.
- (b) This question elicited some thoughtful answers, noting that under the praise for creation lie some darker thoughts typical of Jennings. Strong responses noted the individual elements of perfect creation in the opening stanza before looking at the indications of ‘order’ and ‘rule’ in the second, where creation is controlled. Perceptive candidates noted that the tone changes in stanza 3 with the ominous ‘blood’ and ‘drums’ which ‘pound’. Some noted the importance of Jennings’ choice of a predator for this stage of the poem, which develops to ‘darkness’ and ‘passion’ which is ‘beyond reason’, contrasting with the order of stanza 2. While some were puzzled by the closing of the poem, others suggested that the reference to the open mind suggests that humankind is capable of rational thought – ‘reason’ – and can therefore order and rule ‘passion’. This view was often connected with Jennings’ own Catholic beliefs. Less successful responses looked at individual images without connecting them to the developing meaning of the poem, while others missed the import of the central stanzas.

3. *Songs of Ourselves, Volume 2*

- (a) A small number of candidates opted for the question on the exploration of feelings of rejection, but among the answers, poems such as ‘These Are the Times We Live In’, ‘Border Builder’, ‘The White House’ and ‘The Migrant’ featured most frequently, though ‘The Forsaken Wife’ and ‘I Find No Peace’ also appeared a number of times. From this choice of poems, answers tended to focus on rejection through racism and xenophobia or within relationships. It was pleasing in some of these answers to see that candidates knew their chosen poems well and were able to quote from them to support their points and comment on the effects of particular choices of language and imagery, for example considering the connotations of ‘building’, ‘door’, ‘bricks’, ‘blood’, ‘tightened face’ and ‘sharp as steel’, while there was also interesting discussion of the structure of Dharker’s and Rumens’ poems.
- (b) Spenser’s poem was often confidently, but incorrectly, defined as a Petrarchan sonnet even by candidates who commented on the final couplet. Others tried to make the sonnet fit the Petrarchan octave/sestet structure, which missed the final epigrammatic couplet. These difficulties with structure were often indicators of candidates not carefully following through the development of ideas in the poem itself and expounding their meaning, but instead choosing isolated examples of language or technique for comment. More successful responses looked at ways in which the poem deals with the time of absence between the lovers, starting with the initial ‘Since’ and progressing through ‘long weary days’, ‘many nights’, ‘evening until morn’, ‘day’, ‘night’, ‘extend’ and ‘every minute’ to emphasise the sense of slowness of time when the lovers are separated. Such answers noted that the speaker of the poem is frustrated with the length of both day and night as he waits in ‘expectation’ and ‘grief’. Those candidates who were alert to the final couplet noted the way it neatly summarises the speaker’s condition, antithetically balancing the ‘long’ hours of ‘sorrow’ with the ‘fast’ flying ‘joyous hours’, with the two rhyming words contrasting.

4. JHUMPA LAHIRI: *The Namesake*

- (a) Some candidates saw the older generation as representatives of traditional culture and wrote essays on cultural identity, using the question wording as a slight springboard to a different question. Again it is worth saying that it is very important for candidates to consider carefully the precise wording of questions which they attempt to answer, as Examiners are unable to reward essays which wander off the specified topic. More successful responses usually started with Ashoke and Ashima, considering the differing ways in which they are shown to adapt to life in America and are perceived by their growing children. Fruitful responses also considered the

generation older than them, looking at Ashoke's and Ashima's relationships with their own parents and the values enshrined in that generation. Some good answers also considered Lahiri's presentation of Ashoke's and Ashima's American contemporaries, especially Maxine's parents, to discuss how the American older generation live different lives and have different values and expectations from Ashoke and Ashima.

- (b) This was the most popular question on the paper and drew many detailed and perceptive responses. While there were certainly some narrative answers, many candidates showed they could say a good deal about Lahiri's choices of language and the structure of her sentences. Subtle answers noted that the third person narrative takes Gogol's perspective, observing his parents in a detached way as they are 'weeping like children', and reducing his relatives to a 'row of people', showing his lack of connection with India. The references to 'Gogol knows...' suggest the predictability of events for him and candidates contrasted Ashima 'staring at the clouds' with Gogol's 'relief' as he re-enters the western world on the aeroplane. There was also some interesting discussion of the second paragraph and the details of the Gangulis' readjustment to life in America, with the contrasts between the full 'refrigerator', 'space' and 'silence' and the busy family life in India they have just left. Candidates noted Lahiri's references to American foodstuffs and domestic activities in listing sentences and that all the members of the family soon adapt, their Indian experiences are 'quickly shed, quickly forgotten'.

5. EDITH WHARTON: *The House of Mirth*

- (a) While there were not many answers on Bertha Dorset, candidates recognised her role as a representative of the values of New York's affluent society and as a foil to Lily. There was usually good knowledge of her pivotal role and influence in society and her role in Lily's expulsion from the yacht was much discussed. The most successful answers looked at her presentation through what other characters say about her as well as her own behaviour, while a few particularly strong responses were also able to look at her speech.
- (b) The passage on Percy Gryce repaid careful reading and responsive candidates drew much from the details of Wharton's writing. From its damning first sentence, the passage shows a character devoid of life and interest, with his only distinguishing feature being inherited rather than original. Confident answers noted how Gryce is further characterised through his 'appalling' house like a 'mausoleum' and his 'monumental' mother, who is as self-regarding as her son, both of them delighting in seeing their names in print and writing. Many noted Wharton's tone of mockery in the final paragraph of the extract where Percy needs protection from the rain and is linked with 'a batch of pale men'. In looking at others' attitudes towards Percy, candidates noted that 'maternal breasts' 'fluttered' at the thought of him, establishing his role as a highly desirable potential husband. Some commented on the ironic gap between this and the dullness of the character described in the passage and Wharton's method of satirising the materialistic values of New York society. Lily's role in watering his 'thirsty soil' was also noted, and her own desire to capture Percy's attention. Candidates with a broader view of the novel were able to apply their knowledge of Lily's ultimate failure to marry Percy and how this passage illuminates that part of the novel.

6. *Stories of Ourselves*

- (a) The few responses to this question used stories such as 'Five Twenty', 'Games at Twilight', 'The Village Saint', 'The Signalman' and Lim's 'Journey'. In many cases, answers relied on narrative accounts of the stories with an explanation of the surprise. In few cases did essays look at ways in which the authors prepared readers for the surprise or discuss the effects of that surprise on a reading of the rest of the story, perhaps by encouraging a reevaluation of what has been read.
- (b) The question on the extract from 'Meteor' attracted far more answers, and while some were descriptive and narrative, there were also many thoughtful responses which teased out ways in which Onn's Journal provides the reader with the aliens' perspective on earth, encouraging the reader to reconsider what is ordinary. Many linked this new perspective to the end of the story, noting that the reader has been led to understand Onn's race from passages like the extract, and therefore feels sympathy, or even outrage, at their final fate. Others too compared the Journal's previous references to a planet 'like a blue pearl' with the passage's opening 'terrible place' and the tension built up through references to 'horror' and 'hideous monstrosities'. Perceptive candidates noted that the writer of the Journal is not identified or described in any way, and though the names are unusual, the attitudes expressed are recognisably human, and in this way Wyndham creates empathy between the reader and the Fortans. They noted too that the reader relies on Onn's

description and has to work out the position of the Globe from his observations, so his unusually small point of view forces the reader to 're-see' the shed, the table, the skylight and the cat. A few less responsive candidates offered the opinion that since the Fortans cannot understand what they see, they are clearly not as intelligent as their technology suggests, but these were in a minority. Better answers looked at the careful, detailed descriptions and the rationality of the interpretation, and understood the lack of comprehension from one seeing the world from a height of less than 'a quarter of an inch', as we are told at the end of the story.

7. AMA ATA AIDOO: *The Dilemma of a Ghost and Anowa*

- (a) There were no responses to this question.
- (b) There were no responses to this question.

8. WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Antony and Cleopatra*

- (a) The few essays offered in response to this question saw duty represented by Rome and pleasure by Egypt and noted that the two were in conflict. Sometimes the duty, pleasure and conflict were illustrated by reference to particular episodes in the play. More developed answers looked more closely at the characterisation of Antony himself, seeing this as Shakespeare's way of epitomising the conflict between duty and pleasure, with references to the early scenes in Egypt, his trip to Rome and his ultimate return to Cleopatra. The best answers were supported not just with careful reference, but with key quotations from Antony's speeches in particular.
- (b) This passage seemed to be enjoyed by the few candidates who wrote on it. They looked in particular at Cleopatra's speech II. 11–28, noting the prevalence of questions as she seeks to imagine Antony's distant actions. Her hyperbolic descriptions of Antony were also noted, as well as the ways in which she characterises herself as she wallows in memories of current and previous love affairs. The dialogue with Alexas also provided much to discuss, as Shakespeare shows Cleopatra eager to grasp any news of Antony, while several candidates noted the humour in her energetic threats at the end of the extract, following Alexas' provocative comparisons between Antony and Caesar. Here some imagination of the play in performance allowed candidates to discuss stage action.

9. BRIAN FRIEL: *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*

- (a) Although Friel's play was the most popular drama text by a large margin, far fewer candidates attempted this question. A small number of responses noted that Ireland is presented in the play as a static place offering few excitements or opportunities, particularly for young people, which is what makes Gar want to leave. However, candidates found it more difficult to support these views with close reference to parts of the play. There was reference to SB's lack of communication, to the dullness of the Canon and the behaviour of Gar's friends, though these often needed a greater sense of shaping into an argument.
- (b) The vast majority chose to comment on the passage from the beginning of the play with Gar and Madge, and often did so with sensitivity and appreciation. Candidates noted the stage direction '*ecstatic with joy and excitement*' and Gar's singing, as immediate energetic indicators of his enthusiasm for his forthcoming departure and also noted the playfulness of his relationship with Madge, with the dancing, teasing and tickling, reciprocated despite her protests. They also noted the early indications of his resentment of SB, noting his apparent lack of awareness of Gar's departure and his constant demands for work which result in Gar's revenge by over-salting the pollock and jokes about 'corpses... strewn all over Ballybeg'. Some thoughtful responses noted that an undercurrent of sadness is already present, voiced in Gar's resentment of SB, but also expressed in Madge's view that he is 'losing a treasure' and Gar's own desire for reassurance that he will be missed. The strongest answers showed a strong sense of the movement of the scene as well as the dialogue.