

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 8695/21
Writing

Key messages

- Candidates should manage their time carefully, allocating an equal amount of time for each section of the paper. Candidates are advised to allocate a set amount of time to: identifying factors for writing; planning to write; writing; checking; and correcting.
- When reading the questions, candidates should concentrate on the instructions and should carefully interpret and deconstruct the question. For example, in **Question 1** the key instruction is to 'write a story', creating a sense of 'drama and suspense' and in **Question 6** the key instruction is to 'write the script of the talk and to 'create a sense of the rewards and challenges'. To ensure that candidates do understand the key requirements of each question, it may be helpful to underline key words within the question.
- Effective planning, following on from successful interpretation of the question, leads to better crafted and well-shaped responses, therefore minimising irrelevant detail and generic content.
- Candidates should also consider the following as part of the planning stage: the *purpose* of the piece, the prescribed *form* and *audience* as well as the most appropriate *voice* or persona to adopt, the *mood* and *tone* that they should try to create in their writing and the most suitable *structure* to employ. One key aspect of the most successful and effective writing in **Section A** is a convincing and credible narrator/persona, while the key aspects of the most successful and effective writing in **Section B** are a clearly developed, logically sequenced structure, together with an authentic sense of voice.
- Candidates must understand the importance of writing in clear, properly punctuated English, with accurate sentence demarcation, to perform well in this exam, including those scripts that have good content. One error that occurred regularly was that of separating sentences with commas rather than full stops. Clear expression in simple and compound sentences without much variety is preferable to expression in long, rambling sentences that do not flow easily. Candidates must be aware of the need for appropriate paragraphing in their responses, including paragraphing for direct speech.
- Candidates should be encouraged to proofread carefully, particularly for accurate sentence demarcation and for tense confusion/inconsistency. Such errors impede, sometimes seriously, the overall sense of fluency and cohesion.
- In preparing for **Section A**: Imaginative writing, candidates should develop skills in differentiating between 'showing' versus 'telling', to improve both descriptive and narrative skills. 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, newspaper correspondence, speeches and voiceover scripts.

General comments

Technical accuracy tended to be more secure in **Section B** than in **Section A**, where tense errors and confusions often caused problems. **Section B** responses were also often structured more effectively than **Section A**. Overall, it was pleasing to note that more responses were paragraphed effectively than in previous sessions.

Quite a number of submissions self-penalised on the grounds of rubric infringement: some responses were appreciably short of the minimum word limit. Candidates should practise writing time-limited tasks to a specific word count.

There was sometimes a tendency to write stories in **Question 3**, when descriptive writing was required, although this was not as evident as in previous years. For **Section A**, strong responses were those with an original flavour and a convincing sense of place, character or atmosphere. For example, the reader was able to feel a sense of drama and suspense in the story in **Question 1**; appreciate the contrasting atmosphere of the two descriptive pieces in **Question 2**; or visualise the colour, sound and movement in **Question 3**.

Imaginative writing could often have been improved with a higher degree of structural control (for example, ensuring the use of paragraphs) and employing suitable language devices to create effects. Some weaker responses included tense confusions, especially in attempts to create drama or a sense of time passing in **Question 1**. Candidates should be encouraged to utilise one main tense in their stories.

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 revealed difficulties with using the conventions of different forms, establishing a mature, credible voice, or developing a well thought-out, logically organised line of argument.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Imaginative writing

Question 1 – Story

Write a story called *Surprise*, about an unexpected visitor. In your writing, create a sense of drama and suspense.

This was the most popular question by far and most candidates wrote complete stories. Some responses were story openings; these needed to be rounded off to form a complete story, as instructed in the question.

Stronger candidates managed to generate drama and suspense by skilfully creating character and setting from the opening of the story, for example, 'Dusk encroached onto the terrace of our house faster than usual; black clouds gathered casting an ominous shadow across the landscape.' These candidates also kept the reader guessing by gradually revealing plot details that allowed for rising tension and suspense. Manipulation of narrative viewpoint and character perspective proved to be successful. In one successful response, the writer adopted a third person narrative viewpoint of a break-in to a house. The robber was referred to as the intruder and, through the deployment of subtle clues, the reader was left under the impression that this was no ordinary thief, before the final reveal that the intruder was in fact a raccoon.

Weaker responses often started with mundane and routine detail which was not relevant to the task, for example, 'My alarm buzzed with its usual annoying buzz, it was 7.30 am, time to get ready for school'. They tended to demonstrate a more limited use of imagination and often wrote about surprise birthday parties, other celebratory events or being reunited with long lost family members, or took the title too literally, ending with someone shouting 'Surprise!'. There were quite a number of answers where the visitor seemed scary but turned out to be a kitten or puppy. Many also mimicked popular genres of horror/thriller and there was a disconcerting amount of violence in some scripts.

Question 2 – Contrasting descriptive pieces

Write two contrasting descriptive pieces (300 – 450 words each): the first about a brand-new stadium built for a national sporting event; and the second about the same stadium, disused and abandoned, ten years later. In your writing, create a sense of atmosphere and place.

Most candidates who answered this question were able to provide a clear contrast between the two pieces. Stronger candidates described emotions as well as the physical stadia, for example, 'It was almost a religious experience going into this massive architectural masterpiece'. Some had the stadium hit by a tornado, replicating the problems that occur in the Florida region. Others used figurative language effectively in their descriptions, for example, 'The gleaming plastic seats kept watch as though expecting an invasion. They were right to: the crowds flooded into the vast expanse of the stands, swarming like bees to their seats.'

Weaker candidates often took a narrative approach to the task and included a personal story such as a family reunion or bereavement. Their descriptions were often very literal, for example, 'There were many seats in rows with colours of the team,' and the contrast was often just the opposite of what had been

described earlier but with a sense of decay/dereliction, such as, 'The outcome of the stadium was not good, the field was a mess, the seats were not good they were pulled off'. Some candidates commented on a game in the first section, whereas they needed to describe the stadium. Others over-used lists of adjectives dealing with the technology and new features of the stadium, needing to create a sense of atmosphere.

Question 3 – Descriptive writing

Write a descriptive piece called *Floating*, about a ride in a hot-air balloon. In your writing, focus on colour, sound and movement to help your reader imagine the scene.

Quite often, description was structured within a narrative framework and sometimes this was very effective, as long as the focus of the writing remained descriptive.

Stronger candidates produced some powerful imaginative writing. They were able to keep to the descriptive stance throughout the piece and colour, sound and movement were described with subtlety and precision. They often featured precise environments for the balloon ride and a specific time of day, such as over a forest for a dusk excursion in autumn; they also employed a focus on the balloon's movements in conjunction with phases of the ride, such as boarding and ascent, utilising a narrative framework to facilitate specified descriptive focus. These candidates used imagery, powerful adjectives and senses to create a vivid and believable scene, for example, 'The ride was like a piano symphony on air' and, 'a blue as faded as denim jeans, the red as deep as the Red Sea'. Some effective description was characterised by the use of different language devices in the same sentence, to intensify the scene: 'The mist blanketed the peaks in a thick cloud of pale hues, like a veil.'

Many other strong candidates used a zooming-in technique to focus on specific landscapes being flown over in the balloon, such as this example which incorporated all three sensory prompts outlined in the question: 'Emerald fields were dotted with gaily-coloured flowers – clusters of blushing peonies and sentinel-like tulips and swathes of bright yellow daffodils and pretty, white daisies. All swaying gently to the soft symphony produced by a tranquil evening's breeze.' Other strong responses took different perspectives, such as one which answered the question from the perspective of a bird that landed on the basket and hitched a short ride.

While the stronger responses started immediately at the balloon with it taking off, the weaker ones often began with a long section of narrative starting from leaving home and eventually arriving at the balloon launch. Many went through the prompts in a pedestrian manner, first writing about colours, then sounds and finally movement. Other weaker responses, rather than producing a descriptive piece, got absorbed in narrative, such as someone's fear of flying and heights, getting caught in a storm, or even a balloon malfunction that ended in tragedy. They often listed adjectives extensively to produce catalogues of colours and sounds, rather than incorporating these into a full and effective description.

Section B: Writing for an audience

Question 4 – Magazine article

In your class, you have been discussing the problems caused by the amount of plastic that people throw away. Write an article for your school magazine called *No More Plastic!* In your writing, create a sense of the scale of the problem and the importance of action.

This Question produced many responses which showed a good level of knowledge about the topic and clear engagement with it.

Stronger candidates used rhetorical language effectively to persuade the audience, linking the topic directly to their lives. One candidate, like many others, began by using a rhetorical question and also personalised the issue thus, 'Do you remember a time when our local beaches were not covered in plastic straws, bottles and bags?' Many used sub-headings and topic sentences effectively to assist them in structuring their talk. Another effective feature was the purposeful use of discourse markers to consolidate structure, for example, 'Another, more obvious example of plastic waste is...', 'Furthermore...', 'Considering our wider environment...'. There were also some particularly effective and convincing concluding messages, in some cases succinctly expressed, with impassioned pleas, such as, 'Small steps can lead to big changes', 'Everything you and I do today determines our tomorrow,' and, 'Earth, our home, can no longer be viewed as disposable.'

Weaker responses provided lots of facts and information, but needed to support their claims with evidence. Many would have done better to remember the form (magazine article) and audience (school) and thus address the school directly. Lengthy digressions on climate change science and tenuous links made to the plastic waste issue caused some responses to lose focus. Candidates needed to balance their responses by fully addressing the second part of the question about the importance of action beyond saying, 'We must do something about it'.

Question 5 – Contrasting reviews

A new TV series about cooking has just ended. Write two contrasting reviews (300 – 450 words each), which will be published on a website called *Your TV*. One of the reviews is positive about the series, the other is critical of it.

The most successful answers for this question were those who conveyed a genuine interest in cooking.

Stronger candidates demonstrated a confident first-person voice and a good understanding of the form of a review. Some clearly focused on unique aspects of their imagined show, criticising it for considered reasons, for example, 'Another factor that led me to conclude that the show was truly horrible was its use of racial stereotypes in a segment called "Food of the inner city"'. Stronger candidates had a good grasp of culinary vocabulary: 'the blends of forest green lettuce, blood red tomatoes, and sunbeam orange carrots created such a sense of elegance', 'whoever fries their eggs in half butter, half oil?' and, 'each episode whisked away our troubles and stirred the inner chef in us'. They also often reviewed a variety of aspects of the programme, such as the personalities of the host and guest chefs, the range of culinary techniques and specialised equipment featured and the usefulness of the programme's own website.

Weaker responses were often more vague, with some eschewing to mention the name of the programme they were reviewing. They tended to answer the task in the form of a recount or report of a particular episode, rather than reviewing it critically. Reviews providing exaggerated opposite opinions – for example, 'Wow, what an amazing show!' contrasted with, 'What was this mess of a show?' – needed to go beyond this to include more subject-specific detail. Some focused on the personalities of the chefs and guests in 'mirrored' reviews and could have explored further aspects of the show. The fact that the show had just ended suggests that reviewers would need to use a variety of past tenses, which brought out some grammatical weaknesses in some writing.

Question 6 – Script of a talk

A young teacher is going to give a talk to a group of 16-year-old students who are interested in teaching as a career. Write the script of the talk. In your writing, create a sense of the rewards and challenges that this type of work can bring.

Most candidates showed a real understanding of the challenges facing teachers, and were able to balance this very well with the rewards.

Stronger candidates gave some careful explication of personal professional experience of 'highs and lows' in and out of the classroom, with an equitable focus on 'rewards' (such as moulding young minds, educating future leaders, one's own emotional and professional development) and 'challenges' (such as disrespectful or problem students, lack of resources and unreasonably large class sizes). Stronger candidates noted that they were supposed to be a young teacher and gave convincing examples of their experience and helpful guidance for future teachers. They were able to discuss the topic in detail and used language features to persuade their audience, providing more sophisticated reasoning, for example, 'Teaching is a healthy way to keep your brain functioning and learning new information' and, 'balancing time might be tricky sometimes'.

Weaker candidates sometimes used an informal register that was not appropriate to the context of the talk, such as, 'you know bro' or, 'like, right?' Examples of experience also needed to sound more realistic at times. Some responses were framed as an article or letter, and there were other instances where 'talk' was interpreted as 'conversation', resulting in a transcription of an imagined exchange between the young teacher and the audience that did not best facilitate the 'rewards/challenges' emphasis in the question.

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There was sometimes a tendency to write stories in **Question 3**, when descriptive writing was required, although this was not as evident as in previous years. For **Section A**, strong responses were those with an original flavour and a convincing sense of place, character or atmosphere. For example, the reader was able to feel a sense of excitement and anticipation in the story in **Question 1**; appreciate the contrasting atmosphere of the two descriptive pieces in **Question 2**; or visualise the movement, sound and colour in **Question 3**.

Imaginative writing could often have been improved with a higher degree of structural control (for example, ensuring the use of paragraphs) and employing suitable language devices to create effects. Some weaker responses included tense confusions, especially in attempts to create drama or a sense of time passing in **Question 1**. Candidates should be encouraged to utilise one main tense in their stories.

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Comments on specific questions

Section A: Imaginative writing

Question 1 – Story

Write a story called *A New Start*, about going to live in a new place. In your writing, create a sense of excitement and anticipation.

This was the most popular question by far, with nearly two-thirds of candidates answering this question. A large number of candidates wrote about moving to a new house or about leaving home for the first time to join university.

The moment a young person leaves home to be on his own is one filled with anticipation and excitement, so this was quite an effective storyline for stronger candidates, who managed to generate excitement and anticipation by focusing on specific details and elaborating on characters' thoughts and feelings. For example, one candidate, writing about leaving home for university, wrote: 'Maa nodded, tears rolling down her red, puffy cheeks. I could tell by her heavily sunken eye bags, puffy, almost swollen cheeks and raspy voice, that she had been up the whole night, balling her eyes out. But I had to do this. For myself. For Maa. For us.' Stronger candidates also moved smoothly through their narratives, creating a sense of excitement and anticipation both in the language used and in the sequencing of events in their narratives.

Weaker candidates needed more originality in the beginnings and narratives of their stories, to provide more detail and to make the reader feel more engaged. An example of an extract from such a response which would benefit from this direction is: 'I would meet different people, different neighbours and different lifestyle. Changing a place to live would be going to hard for me leave the place where I used to live for more than years would be hard.'

Question 2 – Contrasting descriptive pieces

Write two contrasting descriptive pieces (300 – 450 words each): the first about a large train station at rush hour; and the second about the same station in the middle of the night. In your writing, create a sense of atmosphere and place.

It was sometimes evident that candidates found it more difficult to describe the station late at night, leading to some descriptions that were a bit unbalanced.

Stronger candidates were able to bring out a clear and balanced contrast between the two pieces, using a range of language effects to create a sense of atmosphere and place. The more engaging answers brought out the disorder, noise and near chaos in the train station during the rush hour, compared to the sheer peace and silence in the middle of the night. Many candidates focused on the different people in the setting to very good effect, sometimes with humour, for example, 'There was even a bespectacled boy who was carrying a large trunk, on top of which was a cage containing an owl. Honestly, you get all sorts of people in this station!'

Others demonstrated familiarity with the ingredients of platform life around a large station in their country and recalled smells, sounds and sights effectively: 'As you make your way towards the entrance of the central station, a foul smell hits you, a smell created by the sweat of hundreds of people and other factors like the most unhygienic washrooms.'

Weaker candidates needed to address the 'sense of atmosphere and place' part of the question, and tended to write vignettes about separate groups, activities, and events or relied on listing: 'During rush hours one can struggle to purchase tickets due to the long waiting hours for tickets, people usually reach early in the morning at 5am to get tickets first.'

Question 3 – Descriptive writing

Write a descriptive piece called *On the Dancefloor*. In your writing, focus on movement, sound and colour to help your reader imagine the scene.

Some very good pieces were written in response to this question. Quite often description was structured within a narrative framework and sometimes this was very effective, as long as the focus of the writing remained descriptive.

Stronger candidates produced some powerful imaginative writing. They were able to keep to the descriptive stance throughout the piece and movement, sound and colour were described with subtlety and precision. Figurative language, especially metaphor, played a large part in a lot of these effective responses, for example, 'The music is steady. Fluid. It urges the candidates to succumb to its temptation, persuading them to follow its intoxicating rhythm. The tune is so potent that you can taste it in the charged air, mingled with the palpable excitement and nervousness in the room.' One candidate took an original approach, describing an ice cream parlour as the dance floor, with the dancers becoming the combinations of ice cream colours that swirled and combined together in their containers as they were mixed for the customers. Another candidate wrote effectively about colour, moving beyond the simplistic listing sometimes evident in responses: 'The walls were painted a shade of red so dark that at first glance it appeared black. They seemed depthless if one stared at them for too long.'

Weaker candidates wrote mostly in narrative form, which hindered attempts to achieve movement, sound and colour effectively. Others relied on listing adjectives for their description, producing catalogues of colours and sounds, and went through the prompts in a pedestrian manner, first writing about movement, then sounds and finally colour, rather than incorporating all of these elements into a full and effective description.

Section B: Writing for an audience

Question 4 – Review

You recently saw a TV documentary about natural life under the sea. Write a review of the documentary, which will be published in your school magazine.

Most candidates who answered this question showed awareness of the hazards of water pollution. The majority of candidates achieved an appropriate sense of voice and directed their discourse at an appropriate audience.

Stronger candidates wrote enthusiastically about the documentary and used an appropriate tone for a school magazine. One began thus: 'Did you know that 95 per cent of the seas are still unexplored? And we have already found hundreds of species in the five percent we have explored. Who knows what kind of monsters we'll find down there? Maybe scary enough to give Hollywood a new angle for monsters in sci-fi films.' One candidate showed gentle humour appropriate to the readership of a school magazine, contrasting this documentary with so many others which, 'drone on and on – and are always narrated by Benedict Cumberbatch'.

Weaker candidates gave an account of the documentary's contents without reviewing it. Others started their writing as a review but lapsed into talking about the climate crisis and issues to do with pollution of the ocean, losing focus from their review and struggling to include appropriate content. For example, one candidate wrote: 'Life is fascinating while here on land there's a whole other world in the sea which we know close to nothing about we might know a few fishes here and there but we might not expect the depth that it holds.'

Question 5 – Contrasting letters

A local newspaper recently published an article about plans to prevent cars from driving into the centre of town where you live. Readers were invited to write letters to respond to this article. Write two contrasting letters (300 – 450 words each): one supporting the plans in the article; and the other criticising them.

Stronger candidates were able to make sustained arguments, demonstrating a clear understanding of the purpose and format of a letter to the editor. Many candidates focused on discussing pollution, health issues and safety as reasons to ban cars. The critical responses highlighted business interests, mobility issues and lack of decent public transport as reasons to oppose the ban. Some of them also used examples of the issues faced by elderly citizens, children and families while giving statistical evidence to substantiate their views. They used a range of other rhetorical devices such as rhetorical questions, different sentence structures, direct address and powerful vocabulary. The best responses were formal in tone and convincing, challenging others' opinions in an incisive, yet polite, manner.

Weaker candidates needed to develop on their opinions, sometimes presenting them in a list format that doesn't correspond to the required form of the writing: 'It is very good idea that the cars should not be driving in the centre of the town where we live because it is not save for us that cars been driven in the society where we live their children playing old people walking and you never know what is going to happen next.' An absence of paragraphs in many weaker responses affected the organisation of ideas and arguments. In some cases, the candidates did not use sufficient vocabulary to express some of the more complex ideas. Other candidates wrote two contrasting mini-essays without following the conventions of a letter as instructed in the question.

Question 6 – Script of a talk

A student who recently ran a marathon for the first time is going to give a talk at your school about the experience. Write the script of the talk. In your writing, focus on the sense of achievement and on the challenges and rewards that this type of physical activity can bring.

This was the most popular question in **Section B**. Many candidates focused on all three of the aspects stipulated in the question (sense of achievement, challenges and rewards), although there tended to be an overlap between sense of achievement and rewards.

Stronger candidates often built themselves a character as a mover, 'slow', 'lazy' and 'slightly obese' and wrote up a narrative through the challenges, 'I could barely run a kilometre without passing out', then rewards, 'Then soon came a point when I became addicted to the gym and my healthy lifestyle.' More challenges followed in the marathon, 'I could not keep up with some of the athletic runners, but it was enough to be in the middle', and finally achievement, 'I finally felt like a winner. I still feel like a winner'.

Weaker candidates tended to place emphasis on one or two of the aspects stipulated in the question rather than responding to it fully. Rather than write a talk, some candidates wrote a question and answer session that didn't adhere to the form specified in the question. Some candidates seemed to become very emotionally involved in their own or created experiences, and thus neglected to address their audience.

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Comments on specific questions

Section A: Imaginative writing

Question 1 – Story

Write a story which begins with the following sentence: *Suddenly everything was silent; he stood still, not knowing what to do next.* In your writing, create a sense of suspense and drama.

Stronger candidates clearly focused on creating suspense almost immediately, as suggested by the given opening sentence. Effective opening paragraphs included the following examples: 'As far as the eye could see, only a few lights were visible. He was alone. Yet at the same time, an uneasy feeling of being watched crept over him' and, 'The sound of the car engines and laughter was replaced by the wind, only the wind.' Stories about domestic violence and dramatic assaults created a sense of drama and suspense, through expressions such as, 'His heart beat fast, as his hands clenched around the door handle,' and, 'her green eyes filled with fear.'

Another writer depicted a Game of Thrones type hero who was forced to choose between blowing up an entire building full of innocent people or suffering instant death at the hands of a ruthless Emperor. This was handled with some ability. Another effective idea was ingenious, framing a typical action moment within another perspective. The hero, Josh, was being cornered by villains, masked and armed, about to kill him. They did so and, after dying in agony, Josh's chest had stopped rising, showing his death. At this point a hard voice broadcasts 'CUT!'....The four men walk back to their starting positions, ready to perform the scene again. 'And....ACTION!' Most effective answers used a 'showing' and not 'telling' technique to create a sense of drama: for example, 'He could hear a faint ringing that caused his head to throb and his heart to hammer out of his chest.'

Weaker responses lacked paragraphing and needed to focus more on creating the sense of suspense and drama. Some of the responses also needed more developing and were under the specified word count. Some candidates tended to rush into an action-packed narrative and lost control, either of the narrative or linguistically. An example of a weaker response was a story about a paintball competition where the main character, 'blindly shoot at the enemies' and was saved when, 'Ron bombed most of the fleet attacking me.'

Question 2 – Contrasting descriptive pieces

Write two contrasting descriptive pieces (300 – 450 words each): the first about an old and unused building in a town centre; and the second about the same building, being used as a community centre a year later. In your writing, create a sense of atmosphere and place.

Responses to this question often took quite a mechanical approach of listing what the building looked like before and after, with little interest for the reader. However, the revival of the building was usually dealt with in a far more dynamic and interesting way.

Stronger candidates had a clear image in their minds of the building's location and what it looked like. One, for example, was situated in an abandoned shopping centre, where, 'The area was not only devoid of life; it seemed to actively fight life.' The writer went on to clarify the sense of decay with detailed descriptions of crumbling walls and decaying plants. Then, after the restoration and conversion into a community centre, 'Drivers have found themselves slowing down to admire the life expanding from the building. The walls are decorated with hand-drawn murals of jungle animals' and the piece ended: 'Life and death are in a constant struggle with each other. The new centre gives life an edge over death.'

Weaker candidates tended to give rather flat descriptions of the building, making it hard for the reader to picture the building, or simply wrote in the second piece the opposite of everything from the first: a fault in the first half was transformed into a positive in the second. Candidates who produced such responses needed to give more thought to creating an atmospheric piece. For example, 'the building was old and abandoned with no-one in it' in the first piece became, 'the building was lively with lots of people in it' in the second piece.

Question 3 – Descriptive writing

Write a descriptive piece called *The Harbour*. In your writing, create a sense of atmosphere, and focus on colour and sound to help your reader imagine the scene.

Responses to this question were generally focused. Some that were purely narrative needed to offer more in the way of description.

Stronger candidates focused on creating distinctive moods/atmosphere by carefully considering vocabulary choices, such as in this evocative description of a harbour that 'lies in silence, only punctuated by the fishermen and a small church. I could see gray ships on a rough gray sea outlined by a gray sky that was obstructed by gray fog'. Another strong response placed the description in the context of the animated atmosphere of an annual festival.

Weaker candidates sometimes used unconvincing expressions, such as, 'I felt my prancing heart combust' and tended to lose control of vocabulary. Some struggled a little with what one would see at a harbour and responded with a sea-based narrative rather than a description. Weaker candidates also tended to use all their descriptive ideas at the beginning, resorting to narrative in the remaining part of the response.

Section B: Writing for an audience

Question 4 – Report

You recently attended an open day at a university, to look around and decide if you would like to study there in the future. Write a report for your school magazine, describing the facilities and giving your impression of what it would be like to study there.

Many candidates wrote positively and logically about their visit, focusing on facilities (gym, food court, the library, etc.) and discussing their quality. There were some candidates who didn't address the latter half of the question concerning what it would be like to study at the university; candidates needed to cover the whole question in order to be successful.

Stronger candidates were able to engage their intended audience by creating a suitable tone. They wrote about college facilities and used this as a springboard to develop their ideas and opinions about studying at the university. Some of them seemed to draw on recent experience of college visits and wrote convincingly. They discussed fraternities and sororities, the 'nature of campus' and buildings that were 'clean and sustainable'. Some opted to use sections with headings for this question, which improved the flow and structuring of ideas.

Weaker candidates limited their responses to writing about the facilities and were rather list-like in structure. They needed more development and used general words such as 'amazing' and 'beautiful'. The weakest candidates gave a room-by-room description, focusing on unimportant details, such as the colour of the chairs, in a haphazard way. There was a lot of repetition of vocabulary, such as 'nice' and 'modern' and over-use of superlatives, for example, 'the best laboratories' and 'the largest library'. They often found it hard to achieve and maintain a suitable register.

Question 5 – Contrasting articles

A newspaper recently invited readers to write articles responding to the opinion that children have too many rules in their lives. Write two contrasting articles (300 – 450 words each): one supporting the opinion; and the other challenging it

Some candidates chose to write the two contrasting pieces from a parent and child, thus enabling them to create different voices. The adult's voice was often more effective than the child's or teenager's, with more convincing arguments. Some candidates confused rules with responsibilities.

Stronger candidates produced well-balanced responses to this question. Many argued that over-strict rules can have a damaging effect on the growing child, and can make him/her socially isolated, and resentful. 'The institution of a dictatorship over the children has an adverse effect', wrote one candidate, while another wrote, 'I have two beautiful children and believe that allowing a child to grow and thrive unrestricted makes them more well-rounded, overall better, more human people.' On the other side of the argument, 'Rules are the building blocks of life', one candidate wrote, and others urged the need for guidance, boundaries, and respect. One writer admitted to having had extremely strict parents to whom he felt grateful, having graduated from a prime university. 'If we want future generations to succeed', he claimed, 'we must hold children to the highest standards.'

Weaker candidates struggled to give an equal commitment to both the positive and negative responses and often the challenge of adding depth to the discussion was not entirely met. Others that used a mirroring approach for positive and negative perspectives tended to fall into repetition.

Question 6 – Voiceover

Write the voiceover script for a TV news report about the discovery of some ancient treasure in your area. In your writing, create a sense of excitement and focus on the importance of the occasion.

Not all candidates demonstrated a full grasp of the format of a 'voiceover', which sometimes led to responses not being fully appropriate to the task.

Stronger candidates skilfully combined the description of each of the TV shots with the voiceover that accompanied it. They presented a detailed visual illustration of the footage, which was then well supported by the verbal component of the voiceover text. Some successful responses created a sense of excitement by asking questions and providing hints about a lost civilisation, the material used for building the structure not being indigenous to the area and a sense of mystery arising from the discovery of engraved symbols.

Weaker candidates often wrote their responses in the form of an article or a conversation between two reporters commenting on the event; such responses needed to provide more representation of what was happening on screen.

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 8695/91
Poetry, Prose and Drama

Key messages

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- Specific references and quotations are needed to support points in essays. This should be particularly remembered for the **(a)** questions, where candidates select their own material to answer the question. Line references to passages are not a substitute for quotations.
- Successful essays develop a line of argument in response to the question, developing points to a conclusion.
- Answers to **(b)** passage questions should examine the writing of the selected poem or extract in considerable detail.

General comments

A number of the texts and questions stimulated some detailed and subtle responses which showed a mature appreciation of literary methods and the ways in which writers shape a reader's or an audience's responses. The most successful answers to **(a)** questions were able to use detailed knowledge of the texts, including secure references and pertinent quotations, to establish and develop a clear argument in response to the question. Strong **(b)** question responses considered the writing of the selected passage or poem in great detail, drawing out nuances and possible interpretations. Many placed the extract within the context of the text in the case of prose and drama in order to inform the discussion of the passage. Among weaker responses, there was a return to a large number of candidates relying on narrative summary and paraphrase, indicating their understanding of the content of texts and passages, but needing to say more about how that content was communicated.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1 Robert Frost: *Selected Poems*

- (a)** Successful answers to this question chose poems carefully, while inappropriate choices often led to struggling responses. A number of essays used 'Mending Wall' for ease of reference since it was printed on the paper for the **(b)** question; this poem had to be forced to fit the question and usually depended on a misreading of the narrator's attitude to the wall. More successful explorations of Frost's portrayal of secluded rural life used poems like 'The Wood-Pile', 'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening', 'An Unstamped Letter' and 'The Black Cottage'. Many weaker candidates relied on description of the secluded situations in the poems, summarising the content with a few personal observations. Strong candidates wrote about Frost's poetry and the ways in which his poetic choices of structure and language are used to portray a secluded life and direct the reader's response to that portrayal.
- (b)** There were many more responses to 'Mending Wall', with a number of varied interpretations, some depending on misreadings and a confusion between the attitudes of the different neighbours. A number of essays gave a broad summary of the poem, picking out occasional illustrative lines, and would have done better to examine ways in which Frost's choices of language and structure

present the relationship between the neighbours. There were some very fine answers too, developed and subtle in their exploration of Frost's writing. Such answers noted the easy conversational style of the poem created by the iambic pentameter and enjambment as the narrator muses questions in his own head, with just a few lines of dialogue. Some were very aware of the constant irony of the dividing wall being the very thing that once a year brings the neighbours together in joint effort, as they 'keep the wall between us as we go'. There were appreciative comments on the narrator's playful tone, with 'a spell' and 'elves', contrasting the stolid 'Good fences make good neighbours', and some extended, thoughtful discussion of the 'pine' and 'apple' contrast. The success of these responses depended on close attention being paid to the language and tone of the poem, and careful consideration of the effects of Frost's choices of language and metaphor.

Question 2 Elizabeth Jennings: *Selected Poems*

- (a) There were few answers on Jennings' presentation of family relationships, but among those responses, 'Warning to Parents', 'Father to Son' and 'One Flesh' were the most common poems considered. Many weaker essays were summary based, making generalised comments. Some stronger candidates showed appreciation of the precision of Jennings' verse, her careful choices of language and imagery and her management of structure. By looking at these, they successfully explored the tension apparent in the portrayal of relationships in the poems, also noting the tenderness and emotional qualities in some of them.
- (b) A number of weaker answers were dominated by summary, which was not always accurate. There were stronger essays that explored the poem's account of a changing response to Chinese art with the changes in personal relationships. These noted the dryness of artistic appreciation which depends on historical knowledge, described in the first stanza, and the contrast between 'then' in l.5 and 'now' in l.9 as the pivot of change in the poem. Strong answers also noted the implicit contrast between the 'eternity' and 'timelessness' of the art with the ephemerality of the narrator's relationship, but also picked up the appropriateness of the depictions of 'a lover feeling pain'. Some noted, as is common in Jennings' poetry, that strong feeling is constrained by tight stanza form and regular rhythm, but commented on the effects of irregularities, like the triple stress of 'one quick stroke' in the penultimate line, mimetic of the artists' actions.

Question 3 *Songs of Ourselves Volume 2*

- (a) Social problems were interpreted in a number of different ways by candidates, with most focussing on migration and racism, 'The White House', 'The Border Builder', 'The Migrant' and 'These are the Times We Live In' being the most popular choices. This was a question where essays tended to consider effectively the ways in which these ideas are presented, with some good exploration of tone of voice in particular, and word choices that contribute to it. The speaker's position in each poem was often discussed, either directly involved or detached and observant, expressing righteous indignation or sympathy as appropriate. There was some thoughtful consideration of the alternative readings of the title of 'The White House' and sensitivity to the angry tone of the poem's diction and imagery, while Dharker's sardonic humour and flights of fancy in 'These are the Times We Live In' were appreciated in strong, detailed responses. Some candidates wrote well on the violent imagery and forceful repeated questions in 'The Border Builder'. Sensitive readings considered the change in perspective at the end of 'The Migrant', broadening the question of the social problem from its victim, 'She', to the consideration of other people's responses with 'We'.
- (b) William Bell Scott's poem prompted a wide range of answers, from those who believed that the speaker was Bell Scott himself, through those that asserted that Death was personified but needed to consider how and to what effect, to detailed, subtle and thoughtful essays which demonstrated intelligent appreciation. Less confident answers summarised the content of the poem with varying degrees of accuracy. Most candidates aptly attempted some comment on the characterisation of Death – omnipotent and omnipresent – and the change from the conventional human fear of death to the idea of 'fear me not'. Many candidates were able to identify poetic techniques; it's worth remembering that comments on such techniques need to be supported by examples and analysis of their effects on the reader's understanding of the poem. On the other hand, there were some thoughtful responses to elements of the poem such as the riddle-like tone and structure, the powerful sense of isolation in 'I have no brother, and/No father' and the effects of the 'chain'

metaphor, particularly when repeated as the 'cold chain round thy neck', a threatening contrast to 'fear me not'.

Question 4 E.M. Forster: *Howards End*

- (a) There were several narrative responses which summarised events that happen at Howards End, and often a number of events that do not. A surprising number of responses did not mention that the house gives it name to the title of the novel and that the novel begins and ends at the house, indicating its importance to the narrative. Successful answers noted the importance of Howards End at key moments of the plot, including Helen's early visit and Margaret's aborted trip to it before her later visit when she is mistaken for Ruth Wilcox. There was much discussion of the final stages of the novel, located at the house, with Helen's pregnancy and Leonard's death. Most mentioned Ruth Wilcox's handwritten will, overruled by the rest of the Wilcox family, and drew from this the connection between Ruth and Margaret and their mutual appreciation for the house, echoed in Mrs Avery's mistaking Margaret's identity and furnishing the house with her belongings. Thoughtful answers drew out ways in which Forster uses the house to present the different values of the Wilcox and Schlegel families, contrasting Margaret's sensitivity to place and history with the Wilcox's easy acquisition and disposal of property in commercial transactions. These considerations allowed candidates to explore the idea that Forster uses the house to represent an older style England and that he is asking questions about the industrial and commercial development of the country and who should inherit it. Many commented on the ironies of the final stages, with the Schlegel, Wilcox and Bast families represented at the house, while the child of Helen and Leonard Bast will ultimately inherit it.
- (b) There were many lively responses to this question. One element that many candidates missed was the presentation of Jacky, which would have made for opportunity for interesting comment. Successful answers were balanced, showing a good understanding of Leonard, Jacky and the narrative tone, and some drew a contrast between the portrayal of Leonard's inner life and the presentation of Jacky's outward appearance. Candidates often expressed some admiration for Leonard's determination to escape his current circumstances through the pursuit of knowledge and his desire to 'push his head out of the grey waters', while some recognised the comic contrast between the Ruskin prose he attempts to copy and the more straightforward 'his flat was dark as well as stuffy.' Some commented that while his aspirations to culture are laudable, the narrative voice at times seems condescending, referring for example to his 'half-baked mind'. The narrator takes a similar approach to Jacky, some essays noting that her entrance is an interruption to Leonard's thoughts, prefaced by a 'noise'. Many commented on the list of decorations which adorn Jacky, making her ludicrously ostentatious, alongside the frankness of 'she was not respectable' and 'Jacky was past her prime'. It was a passage with plenty of detail to comment on and many candidates explored Forster's narrative effectively.

Question 5 Andrea Levy: *Small Island*

- (a) While candidates appreciated that Levy provides four different perspectives in the novel, a high number of essays became summaries of the four different characters, needing to give more consideration to their roles as narrators and the effects of switching between them, which was the focus of the question. There were sometimes assertions that multiple narrators give the reader a fuller understanding; candidates who discussed this view often needed to provide more support with key references to the text. The smaller number of successful responses considered what makes the different narratives distinctive, considering Levy's creation of the different voices and her use of particular vocabulary and structures for each narrator. They also considered the different experiences narrated in order to give the reader a broad understanding – Hortense's early experiences in Jamaica, Gilbert's early disillusioning experiences in England, Queenie's view of her marriage and so on. Many showed how Bernard's narrative, only appearing late in the text, creates some ambiguous sympathy for a character previously dismissed as ignorantly racist. Perceptive answers were aware of the role of Michael, not a narrator, but featuring in Hortense's and Queenie's narratives, giving the reader and understanding of the significance of Hortense taking Queenie's baby at the end of the novel, of which neither Hortense nor Queenie is aware.
- (b) Hortense's memories of Mr and Mrs Ryder were a stimulus for some enthusiastic responses. A few suggested that her critical portrayal of the altruistic missionaries demonstrates her unattractive character. More perceptive responses were alert to the ironies of her narration, both revealing her

own character and those of Mr and Mrs Ryder. Successful candidates teased out the indications of the hypocrisy of the missionaries, including their patronising assumptions about 'these poor negro children' while they ostentatiously drive their car around, and they matched the indications of Mr Ryder's extra-marital affairs with their wider textual knowledge of Mrs Ryder's future relationship with Michael. There were comments on the deeply unattractive descriptions of Mr Ryder, while perceptive essays pointed out not only that Hortense's descriptions of Mrs Ryder use ironic religious imagery in the reference to a 'halo', but also make judgements of colour and mouth shape which are similar to racist judgements of her and Gilbert in England. Her admiration of Mrs Ryder as 'the whitest woman' is also indicative of her own snobbish appreciation of lighter skin, revealed elsewhere in the pride in her own 'honey' coloured skin.

Question 6 *Stories of Ourselves*

- (a) While young people were often in focus in responses to this question, their hopes and aspirations featured less obviously. There were also some generous interpretations of young people, including the wife in 'Sandpiper', the Happy Prince in Wilde's story and the son in 'The Fly in the Ointment'. More successful answers tended to use stories such as 'The Taste of Watermelon' and 'The Destructors', where the characters are more clearly young, though the other stories could be used successfully if carefully argued with a focus on the question. Those candidates who made use of the full question wording, and considered hopes and aspirations, wrote about ways in which the young boy in 'The Taste of Watermelon' hopes to gain acceptance in his new community and form friendships with an act of daring, and at how those hopes are discovered to be empty when he is shocked at Mr Wills' reaction to the loss of his seed melon. Some essays referred to his clear attraction to Willadean at the end of the story and the suggestion that his hopes for acceptance now lie in another direction. With 'The Destructors', perceptive essays argued that post-war pessimism dominated the story, so that the conventional aspirations of young people for a better world were replaced by hopes for leadership in carefully planned destruction.
- (b) Many essays relied on a summary account of the passage and needed to move beyond assertions that the passage portrays a fantasy world and examine Wells' language in order to be successful. For such a rich passage, opportunities were missed in such answers, whereas stronger responses looked carefully at both diction and structure to show how the world behind the door is created for the reader. While most candidates mentioned that the garden includes panthers, a monkey and parakeets, a smaller number of perceptive candidates argued why Wells' inclusion of such wild creatures from hot climates, and thus very strange inhabitants of a London garden, suggest fantasy. Strong answers noted that the passage is largely dialogue as Wallace remembers his experience. There were some perceptive comments on the repetition of 'I forgot', emphasising the transformative effect of the garden in separating the boy from his ordinary world, followed by the use of comparative adjectives such as 'warmer' and 'mellower'. Successful answers noted the frequent references to colour, creating a vivid mental picture, and the frequent use of adjectives indicating pleasure, such as 'delightful', 'pleasant', 'soft, agreeable', 'kindly', 'pleasant', 'spacious', 'beautiful' and so on. Good answers noted the irony of 'not pictures, you understand, but realities' at the end of the excerpt, and some used their knowledge of Wallace's eventual fate effectively.

Question 7 *Wole Soyinka: Death and the King's Horseman*

- (a) There were too few responses to this question to make a general comment appropriate.
- (b) The few essays in response to this question recognised the different cultures and values which are presented in the scene; how they were presented dramatically was often less clearly discussed. A number of candidates commented aptly on some of the clear contradictions in the dialogue between Pilkings and Elesin, such as their disagreement about 'the peace of the night', their differing understanding of 'duty' and the clash between 'saving a man's life' and 'You destroyed it.' Essays required some knowledge of the context of the scene within the play to explain these contrasts and to recognise the significance of Elesin's captivity – some answers commented directly on the setting of the 'cell' and the sight of 'Figures of the two guards' indicated in the opening stage directions. Good answers also commented on the dignity of Elesin's two long speeches, contrasting the 'sacred drums' with Pilkings' 'feet of desecration', and considered his lament that he has been 'stopped from fulfilling [his] destiny.'

Question 8 William Shakespeare: *Henry IV Part 2*

- (a) Candidates responding here would have done better in general had they focussed on the key phrases in the question, 'in what ways' and 'with what dramatic effects'. Most commented on the plot, pointing out that it contains rebels and rebellions against the king, which showed that the political world of the play is uncertain. For a more successful response, candidates needed to give a more detailed discussion of how Shakespeare presents political uncertainty dramatically.
- (b) There were too few responses to this question to make a general comment appropriate.

Question 9 Brian Friel: *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*

- (a) Friel's play was the most popular drama text and generated some enthusiastic responses. For this question, candidates discussed Public Gar and Private Gar and the differing attitudes to his fantasies, which themselves are so different from his everyday life working for S.B. Answers which were more aware of dramatic presentation referred to the various role plays, voices and songs, compared with Gar's complaints about his father and the dullness of life in Ballybeg.
- (b) More candidates answered the passage question, strongly aware of the timing of the night before departure, as indicated in the question wording. Answers focused on the contrast between Private's speech and the dialogue between S.B. and the Canon, with Private's connection between the music and the emotional memory of the 'blue boat on a lake on an afternoon in May', while the Canon describes the music as a 'noise' and S.B. dismisses it as Gar 'Playing them records of his.' These observations often led to a consideration of the gulf between Gar and his father, poignant on this last evening, with Gar's memories of an 'afternoon' of 'great beauty' which has 'haunted' him ever since, a sign of his yearning for some emotional connection with his father. Astute responses paid close attention to the stage directions, including the adverb 'limply' and the verbs 'drops' and 'sinks' giving visible indications of Gar's disillusionment.

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Paper 8695/92
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Comments on specific questions

Question 1 Robert Frost: *Selected Poems*

- (a) Candidates chose a number of different poems in responses to this question, the most popular being 'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening', 'An Unstamped Letter' and 'An Encounter'. Most essays offered some suggestions about Frost's interest in the natural world. Weaker responses often used biographical context in place of examining the chosen poems closely. Many candidates needed to examine the idea of 'wildness' in the question more directly. The three poems cited above were the most successful; candidates choosing 'Mowing' or 'Gathering Leaves' found it more difficult to fully address the question.
- (b) A substantial number of the essays on 'Birches' gave general broad summaries of the poem and suggested interpretations that would have been more convincing had they been supported with closer examination of the poem's development, language and structure. Successful answers considered the presentation of the trees at the poem's opening, distinguished from the 'darker trees' and full of movement. They looked at the ways Frost's writing creates a visual and auditory impression of the trees loaded with ice which is then melted by the sun, as he builds a view of the

birches as resilient but showing the signs of their endurance. Some considered the playful image of the girl drying her hair before the suggestion of a playful boy having fun by 'riding' the trees 'over and over again'. Suggestions of a sexual interpretation needed to be taken to some conclusion. It is a central image of the poem to suggest a human urge 'Toward heaven', while accepting that 'the ground' and 'Earth' is 'the right place' for humanity. Interpretations of poems need to be drawn from close observation and argument; many less successful responses were so because they were asserted without sustained examination of the text.

Question 2 Elizabeth Jennings: *Selected Poems*

- (a) There were too few responses to this question to make a general comment appropriate.
- (b) There were very few answers on 'The Diamond Cutter', but some candidates recognised that in her description of meticulous and careful artistry, Jennings constructs a metaphor for all art, including the crafting of her own poetry. With such a short poem, very close attention to the writing should have been easily accomplished. Despite this, some essays remained very general. More focused answers considered the cumulative effect of diction such as 'shapes', 'concentration', 'paring down' and 'polished' to show the care and attention of the artist and most commented well on the metaphor of the climber in stanza 2. The exclusivity of the focus was also commented on in good answers – the 'single stone', 'cleaving to/One object' and 'One single comet', with that care distinguishing the 'brilliance' of the final diamond from the 'countless, untouched galaxies.' Candidates alert to structure suggested that the pared down stanza structure, six unrhymed couplets, each developing a different facet of the subject matter, mirrors the work of the diamond cutter and the poem becomes the diamond.

Question 3 Songs of Ourselves Volume 2

- (a) This was a popular question, though problematic for those candidates who wrote about the issue of identity itself with only brief references to poetry that illustrated their point. It must be remembered that it is the ways in which writers present and explore their concerns that is the focus of a literature examination. Stronger answers drew the concern out of the poems chosen, with for example, 'The Forsaken Wife' leading to vigorous discussion of the assertion of independent woman's identity, and 'The White House' to consideration of racial identity in the face of discrimination. These discussions worked well when the language and tone of voice in the poems were carefully discussed and analysed. Another poem used successfully was 'These are the Times We Live In', particularly when candidates looked at identity shrunk to a passport, the suspicion surrounding a name and Dharker's sarcastic humour depicting her imagined changes of visual identity while on the flight. Some commented that she points out in the poem that identity is finally in 'your heart', and this was a poem that repaid careful and detailed discussion. Other poems used included 'The Migrant' and 'The Border Builder', though these were often less successfully addressed to the question.
- (b) While knowledge of the wider context of Milton's *Paradise Lost* was not necessary for a successful answer to this question, it was nevertheless surprising how many candidates had no knowledge at all of where the extract is taken from, despite the indication in the anthology title. Strong responses tended to focus initially on the presentation of evening in the first twelve lines, noting the restfulness of the lack of colour, the sibilance used in the establishing of silence, the precious jewel imagery of the stars and the royal suggestions of 'majesty', 'queen' and 'silver mantle', accompanied by the 'amorous descant' of the nightingale's song. They then moved on to discuss how Adam's speech augments these ideas, articulating God's ordination of evening and night time as a time of rest after the day of the 'dignity' of 'pleasant labour'. Again, the effects of the language and imagery repaid careful discussion, as did the subtle variations of the iambic pentameter. Less successful answers often stumbled on misunderstandings and confusions, which hampered the accuracy of those essays relying on summary.

Question 4 E.M. Forster: *Howards End*

- (a) Several responses to this question were hampered by uncertainty about which house Wickham Place was, some arguing that it was in the countryside, but more were limited in their scope, merely listing various events which take place at the house. Stronger answers showed the

significance of some of these events, including Leonard's visits, which highlight his cultural aspirations, and Mrs Wilcox's visit, which highlights her separation from the world of the Schlegels, despite her connection with Margaret. The most successful essays were able to draw on details from the text, specifically Margaret's view of Wickham Place as 'a female house' and 'irrevocably feminine', in contrast with the Wilcox house on Ducie Street, and reflecting the characteristics of its inhabitants. It is depicted also as a place of art, culture and progressive political thought, further challenges to the Wilcox view of the world. Curiously, few answers showed a full awareness of the Schlegel's impending loss of the house, and their ensuing instability being a key part of the novel. On the other hand, some recognised that the fate of the house, being replaced by flats, is another sign of progress, property and commerce in the novel, lamented by its narrative.

- (b) Most responses to the passage were relevant and made some appropriate observations; less successful answers were dominated by summary and paraphrase. More detailed essays noted the irony of the initial setting, with its sunshine and birdsong, and a few noted the reference to the graves in the churchyard too. Some recognised that the motorcar with its 'Imperial' driver is an early sight of Charles Wilcox, which creates some foreshadowing, as well as Forster's contrast of this figure with the 'yeoman', with the clear statement that 'He is a destroyer.' There was greater focus on the second half of the passage and Forster's portrayal of Leonard's state of mind, conscious of 'private sin' but ambiguously balanced between 'terrified' and 'happy' before his death at the hands of Charles. While a number of candidates noted the irony of his death under a 'shower' of books, fewer noted the sequence of short sentences with 'The man' and 'A stick' as subjects, indicating Leonard's lack of recognition of what is happening to him.

Question 5 **Andrea Levy: *Small Island***

- (a) There were far fewer responses to this question than the passage. Candidates who attempted it were able to show that two time periods were used in the novel. There was often less success with discussing the effects of the repeated changes in its narrative structure. Some argued that the 'Before' sections allow a fuller understanding of the characters, which is true, but they needed to also acknowledge the repeated time shifts, as specified in the question. A few essays interestingly noted the ways the chronologically-fragmented narrative creates puzzles and resolves them for the reader, for example by introducing Hortense's and Gilbert's curious marital relationship before the explanation of its circumstances; Gilbert's wartime experiences of England retrospectively explaining why he understands the country so well after the war; the absence of Arthur from Queenie's house lacking an explanation until a quarter of the way through; and Bernard's narrative in India being delayed until over half way through the novel. This was a question designed to allow candidates to demonstrate their understanding of narrative structure; those who used it as an opportunity for recall of plot itself were less successful.
- (b) The grocer's shop passage produced many responses, many of them detailed and appreciative of both the humour and subtleties of characterisation. Strong responses showed how Hortense's narrative reveals her own snobbery and pride, while showing Queenie's patronising assumptions about her, but that the narration creates unconscious comedy out of the situation. Both women are criticised, but both are also treated with sympathy. Candidates commented on the fact that the narration reveals that both women have racial preconceptions and some discussed Hortense's rhetorical questions indicating her amazement at both Queenie's unnecessary explanations and the shopkeeper's handling of the bread. They also noted her sophisticated vocabulary and phrasing in her 'Impeccable English, rounded and haughty', contrasting with the shopkeeper's and Queenie's assumptions about her. The most successful responses showed appreciation of these elements, supported by close attention to Levy's writing throughout.

Question 6 **Stories of Ourselves**

- (a) The most popular stories used in answers to this question were 'The Destroyers', 'The Door in the Wall' and 'The Taste of Watermelon', though some used stories like 'Sandpiper' and 'The Happy Prince' with less relevance and less success. Many weaker answers focussed on the plots of the chosen stories with some comment on the behaviour of the children; the strongest essays actively considered the authors' presentation of the children and their activities. There was some personal response, indicating which characters attracted reader sympathy, and some consideration of outcome, such as that the narrator in 'The Taste of Watermelon' learns and develops from his experience of destruction, whereas the boys in 'The Destroyers' do not, resulting in a more

pessimistic story. There was, too, some discussion of the contribution of setting, particularly the post-war London of Greene's story, and it would be good to encourage more candidates to go beyond character and plot in order to discuss how narratives are shaped for the reader.

- (b) The passage from 'The Hollow of the Three Hills' was an enormously popular question, though a number chose to write about the young woman and her story rather than the old woman and her powers, thus missing the direction of the question. There were also many responses which summarised the content of the passage rather than writing about the author's methods. In stronger essays, examiners saw many detailed and subtle readings of the passage, sometimes drawing relevantly on Gothic context or the Salem witch trials in their discussion of the characterisation of the old woman and the setting. Many were aware of the familiar tropes of the old hooded figure, augmented by such descriptions as 'withered hag' and 'gray locks', while others discussed the setting of the 'fallen tree', sometimes using knowledge of the wider story to include the circular pool amidst the three hills. The apparent gentleness of the old woman and her constant 'smiling' was contrasted with her commands to the young woman and the apparent relishing of her 'agony and fear.' The descriptions of the vision and the sounds of 'murmurings', 'Shrieks', 'wild roar of laughter' and 'ghastly confusion of terror' drew much close comment. Candidates who looked at the language of the passage found much to discuss and there were many strong answers.

Question 7 Wole Soyinka: *Death and the King's Horseman*

- (a) The few responses to this question were dominated by general discussion of the tradition of ritual suicide of the King's horseman, with limited focus on how Soyinka treats this in the play and shapes an audience's response to it. The use of song, dance and costume in presenting Yoruban traditions were all elements that were largely neglected, and would have made for relevant and fruitful discussion.
- (b) Most responses viewed Pilkings as thoughtless as he disregards Amusa's shock at his appearance in the egungun costume. Some recognised the difference between the responses of Jane and Simon Pilkings and were able to demonstrate that Jane here shows a little more understanding. A few essays showed a developed awareness of the significance of the costume and noted ways in which Soyinka writes Pilkings' lines to demonstrate his ignorance, despite having worked for some time in the area, particularly his sarcastic comment on Amusa's 'delicate sensibilities.' Some discussed the difference between a trivial 'costume' for a ball, regarded as no more than 'fancy-dress', and traditional sacred clothing of enormous cultural significance, commenting on its visual appearance on stage.

Question 8 William Shakespeare: *Henry IV Part 2*

- (a) There were no responses to this question.
- (b) There were very few responses to this question, with some comments on Falstaff's deception and bravado. Responses here showed a need for candidates to ensure that they demonstrate understanding of the scene they are analysing, supporting the points they make with close examination of the dialogue in the passage.

Question 9 Brian Friel: *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*

- (a) There were few responses to this question, most of which acknowledged Kate's place in the plot and Gar's failed romance with her; responses generally needed to develop further beyond this for higher marks. Some essays suggested that the failure of Gar's romantic relationship with Kate lies behind his decision to emigrate, while others suggested that his failure was a result of his own lack of enterprise, which was likely to restrict his ambitions in America too.
- (b) Most answers acknowledged the portrayal of Gar's mixed feelings towards his mother and father in this extract; fewer commented directly on the dramatic presentation. More alert responses noted how the reminiscence about his mother is prompted by an old newspaper, comically introduced before its significance becomes clear. There was some discussion of Gar's own lack of memory of his mother because of her early death and the way his picture of her has been formed by Madge, his replacement mother figure. The poignancy of the age difference between his mother and father,

the loss of his mother's youth and the suggestions of her disillusionment were discussed in good answers, and candidates noted the use of music, foolery and dancing by Gar to distract himself from the emotion. A few responsive essays noted that Public and Private are less separated here than in other scenes, and one or two responses suggested that Gar's refusal to acknowledge emotion was similar to S.B.'s, with different methods of avoidance.

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 8695/93
Poetry, Prose and Drama

Key messages

- This is an examination of understanding and appreciation of literary composition and expression, so responses should focus on how authors' choices of language and literary methods shape meaning.
- Answers which are restricted to knowledge of the content of texts are not successful.
- Specific references and quotations are needed to support points in essays. This should be particularly remembered for the **(a)** questions, where candidates select their own material to answer the question. Line references to passages are not a substitute for quotations.
- Successful essays develop a line of argument in response to the question, developing points to a conclusion.
- Answers to **(b)** passage questions should examine the writing of the selected poem or extract in considerable detail.

General comments

A number of the texts and questions stimulated some detailed and subtle responses which showed a mature appreciation of literary methods and the ways in which writers shape a reader's or an audience's responses. The most successful answers to (a) questions were able to use detailed knowledge of the texts, including secure references and pertinent quotations, to establish and develop a clear argument in response to the question. Strong (b) question responses considered the writing of the selected passage or poem in great detail, drawing out nuances and possible interpretations. Many placed the extract within the context of the text in the case of prose and drama in order to inform the discussion of the passage. Among weaker responses, there was a return to a large number of candidates relying on narrative summary and paraphrase, indicating their understanding of the content of texts and passages, but needing to say more about how that content was communicated.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1 Robert Frost: *Selected Poems*

- (a)** There were very few responses to this question, which tended to look at poems such as 'An Unstamped Letter' and 'Stopping By Woods on a Snowy Evening'. Most showed narrative knowledge of the chosen poems; they generally needed to show more engagement with the effects Frost creates through his poetic choices of language and structure. Answering such a question successfully needs detailed knowledge of the text to facilitate the use of quotations and analysis. There was some discussion of emotional isolation, using 'Home Burial'; most of these essays demonstrated that knowledge of the poem needed to be more thorough in order to form a successful response.
- (b)** While more candidates opted for this question, not many seemed confident with the poem and its meaning. There were some generalised comments about trees and Frost's appreciation of the natural world. The stronger responses wrote well about the auditory qualities of the first few lines and the way they imitate the sound of wind in tree branches, and the importance of Frost's focus on sound before his reference to 'a listening air' in line 9. Successful answers also discussed the

poem's contrary impulses, staying and moving, which are reflected in the swaying of the trees and in 'My feet tug at the floor'. Others noted the way the poem starts with a general reflection on the trees before becoming personal and introspective, a pattern of a number of Frost's poems.

Question 2 Elizabeth Jennings: *Selected Poems*

- (a) There were too few responses to this question to make a general comment appropriate.
- (b) There were very few responses to this question. Some understood that the poem is addressed to Palmer and Chagall, two painters who are contrasted with Blake and Picasso because they have, in Jennings' view, 'only [...] one small/ Yet perfect place.' A very few commented perceptively that Jennings' appreciation of the artists' ability to achieve 'order' and 'make the wildest, darkest dream serene' reflects the nature of her own poetry, as is reflected in the measured rhythm and rhyme of this poem.

Question 3 Songs of Ourselves Volume 2

- (a) Poems chosen here were usually 'The White House', 'The Border Builder', 'The Migrant' and 'These are the Times We Live In'. There were not many answers to this question. Most concentrated on the content and mood of the selected poems, needing to engage more with the details of their language and structure.
- (b) Far more candidates chose to respond to 'Soldier, Rest!', which was one of the most popular questions on the paper. While there were some candidates who misunderstood the poem, most were able to chart its development capably, recognising that 'rest' is used as a euphemistic metaphor for death, and represents death therefore as a welcome respite from the trials of real or metaphorical warfare. Many followed the structure of the poem in their discussion, which was often effective, commenting on the continual contrasts of 'danger', 'warfare', 'fighting', 'waking' and 'sleep', 'dream', 'couch' and 'slumber' in the first stanza. The sound effects of stanza 2 were often the subject of thoughtful discussion, and most noted the parallel of 'Huntsman' in the final stanza, with the repetition of 'rest!' and 'Sleep!' Some observant candidates picked up on the use of military vocabulary in this stanza, as well as comments on the use of martial rhythm and regular rhyme throughout.

Question 4 E.M. Forster: *Howards End*

- (a) There were very few answers on the house at Oniton. Some observed that it becomes just a piece of property to Henry Wilcox, bought with enthusiasm and sold through dissatisfaction, while Margaret fully appreciates it on her one visit there. There was a general need for candidates to support their ideas about the house with details from the novel.
- (b) Some responses to this question missed the comic potential and irony of Leonard's tale of his night-time walk in the outskirts of London, including discussion of Leonard as an 'athlete' and genuine brave adventurer, for example; answers such as this demonstrated a need for candidates to show a higher awareness of the passage's context and of the wider novel. Other stronger answers noted Leonard's frequent recourse to books, which is suppressed by the Schlegel sisters, who are much more interested in his own experience. Some noted that Margaret's comment on Leonard being a 'born adventurer' betrays her own limited experience and that the meeting is presented as having crossed purposes – Leonard wants to talk about books and the cultural world which the sisters inhabit, while they thwart that attempt and want to hear about his walk. Perceptive candidates commented on how these different angles come together in bathos at the end, where Leonard admits that 'The dawn was only grey, it was nothing to mention.'

Question 5 Andrea Levy: *Small Island*

- (a) There were very few answers on this text on this paper. The range of responses was restricted by a tendency for candidates to limit their exploration of contrasting locations to Jamaica and London; by doing so, opportunities were missed to consider the various locations used in England, as well as India, in which parts of the novel are set.

- (b) A small number wrote on the section of Bernard's narrative on his return to England and did use some detail, such as noting the short, fragmented sentences, which, it was argued, show Bernard's lack of emotional engagement and development. This observation fitted well with his holding back from direct contact with Maxi's family, his self-deprecating description of himself as a 'worthless waiter' and his sense of 'Shame' which prevents him from returning to Queenie – here wider knowledge of the text was useful to explain the reasons for Bernard's worries. A number of candidates expressed some insightful sympathy for Bernard's feelings of displacement on his return to England ('smaller than the place I'd left'), suggesting the changes in England and in Bernard's perspective after his time in the army.

Question 6 Stories of Ourselves

- (a) The few responses to this question considered such stories as 'The Taste of Watermelon', 'The Custody of the Pumpkin', 'The Fly in the Ointment' and 'The Destructors'. Essays needed to address the question directly for a successful response, rather than rely on summary and paraphrase. Sometimes candidates understood the reasons, based on the text, why characters behave in the way they do; there was often less success with the discussion of how the writers of the stories present those reasons to the reader. For greater success, candidates need to look more closely at how settings are created, moods evoked and how the writers' choices of language and structure present character and communicate emotions.
- (b) More essays were written in response to the extract from Hughes' 'The Rain Horse'. A number of responses explored the depiction of the unforgiving setting, the vulnerability of the character and the bizarre aggression of the horse. Some discussed the focalised third person narration effectively, detaching the reader from the character but also seeing the situation from his perspective. The hostile dreariness of the setting was also discussed well, with persistent rain, trees 'black as iron' and 'mud'. The close observations, particularly the vivid description of the horse in lines 34–45, straight after the character's repeated 'If it [...] let it' repaid close attention in a number of strong essays. Hughes gives so much in the writing in this story that to respond with a reliance on simple narrative is to miss much of the material for fruitful discussion.

Question 7 Wole Soyinka: *Death and the King's Horseman*

- (a) Most answers to this question acknowledged the tension between Olunde's cultural heritage and his European education. Responses would have been more successful had they considered the dramatic effects of this tension and how Soyinka presents it in the play. To do this well, candidates needed some detailed knowledge of Olunde's scenes with Jane Pilkings, for example, as well as his final actions.
- (b) The shocking presence of Olunde's body on stage was the centre point of most responses to this question. Comments were made on the Praise-Singer's criticisms of Elesin and successful answers considered the visual and physical dramatic impact of the stage directions where Elesin's death is enacted. Candidates would have done well to consider the presence of Pilkings in the scene, whose values are so different from the Yorubans' and whose final act is another cultural mistake. The role of ceremony also needed attention, including the parts played by the Praise-Singer, Iyajola, the Bride and other women.

Question 8 William Shakespeare: *Henry IV Part 2*

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

Question 9 Brian Friel: *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*

- (a) A few responses acknowledged that Ballybeg is a dull place from which Gar is eager to escape, though more consideration was needed of how Friel creates that sense of place. Some referred to the contribution of other characters, including the Canon and Gar's friends, whose limited

perceptions indicate the limitations of the place where they live. A few answers perceptively considered ways in which Gar's songs and role plays create a sense of the excitement and opportunities of the United States.

- (b)** Thoughtful responses to this question noted the changes of mood, beginning with the humour of the judge role play between Private and Public, including discussion of dialogue and stage directions. Madge's entry – few essays noted the visual/verbal joke about the door – signals a shift, with a focus on Gar's preparations for departure and the behaviour of his father. There were some insightful comments about the way Madge's repetition of the phrase 'total indifference' punctures Gar's supposed lack of care; perceptive candidates also noted that Madge's comments suggesting S.B.'s hidden feelings must have an effect on Gar, which he attempts to dismiss with his final comment of the extract.