

WORLD LITERATURE

<p>Paper 0408/01 Coursework Portfolio</p>

Key messages

1. Teachers should check the tasks they set against the examples of suitable tasks given in the *Coursework Training Handbook*.
2. Teachers should annotate each written assignment carefully in order to provide justification for the award of a particular mark.
3. In their conduct of the oral assignment, teachers should follow the guidance in the *Teacher Guide*.

General comments

In addition to this report, Centres will receive individual reports on their internal moderation of candidate work. This general report draws together the main points contained within the Centre reports. There were fewer Centres submitting coursework samples in the November 2016 session, and this report is accordingly less detailed than that for June 2016. Centres new to the syllabus should refer to the June 2016 report for the detailed guidance contained therein.

The majority of tasks set enabled candidates to meet the relevant criteria for each element of the Portfolio. However, there was some evidence of tasks that did not target the descriptors in the marking tables. Where this was the case, Centres have been asked in Centre reports to read the sections on task-setting in the *Coursework Training Handbook*.

Written assignments

For candidates to reach the higher bands in their Critical Essay assignment, tasks should be set which focus on writers' techniques. Examples of appropriate tasks can be found in **Section B** of the Set Texts examination paper. Tasks which omit any mention of the writer generally lead candidates to write about characters as real-life people rather than fictional creations; this approach is unlikely to meet the higher band descriptors and should be avoided through the careful wording of set tasks.

Most Empathic assignments detailed the necessary information about both the chosen character and the moment in the text. This information at the top of the assignment is essential in enabling Moderators to gauge the effectiveness of a candidate's writing in the voice of their chosen character.

Effective moderation of written assignments relies on the careful annotation of candidate work by teachers. Summative comments which draw on the wording of the descriptors and focused ticking of valid and thoughtful points together offer the Moderator a rationale for the award of a particular mark.

A staple or treasury tag properly applied can readily secure a candidate's two written pieces and individual record card in a way that provides ease of access to the Moderator. Plastic covers and card files are not helpful in this regard. Further guidance on appropriate administration and the submission of the Portfolio sample can be found in the *Teacher Guide*.

Recorded Conversations

In stronger conversations, there was an impressive command of the relevant detail in what is a 'closed book' assessment. At the top end of the range candidates were able to deploy and integrate much well-selected reference in support of perceptive and convincing responses to their chosen character or theme.

Less successful oral assignments were characterised by one or more of the following:

- the candidate speaking at length with minimal intervention by the teacher
- a tendency to speak in a general, unfocused way about the chosen text
- the lack of a clear focus for the task.

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Paper 0408/02
Paper 2: Unseen Texts

Key messages

- Candidates who maintain a focus on the exact wording of the question (written in bold in the question paper) are more likely to achieve relevance in their answers. Those who methodically work their way through the bullet points alone without reference to the question tend to offer a more general appreciation of the text, forgetting about the key focus word(s) in the question itself.
- Those candidates who allow time for thinking about the text and planning their response are in a better position to give an overview of the text directed towards the question in their introductions. Those who plunge straight into writing are often still grappling with the text as they write, sometimes contradicting their own earlier comments in the process.
- Candidates who are able to integrate comments on language, form and structure smoothly into their discussion tend to be more successful than those who approach the text with a rehearsed, rigid plan, often characterised by use of a mnemonic as a starting point to planning.
- There is no automatic reward for ‘feature spotting’; comments about simile, metaphor, juxtaposition, etc. should be firmly followed up by an exploration of the meaning or effect achieved.
- Good quotation technique goes a long way to achieving fluency and sharp focus in answers. Those candidates who can use short quotations embedded within a sentence are more likely to achieve this than those who copy out lengthy quotations followed by ‘This shows ...’. Particularly unhelpful are quotations with the ‘middle’ missing, replaced by ellipsis; candidates should be willing to quote directly the words they are commenting on.

General comments

In general, the responses to both poetry and prose were lively and engaged. There was evidence that candidates had been well prepared for this paper and were able to respond to their chosen text type with an emotional as well as a critical response. Strong answers were not only able to explore ‘what’ the writer conveyed, but also concentrated closely on ‘how’, a key word in the questions. Better answers were characterised by an ability to respond to the writer at work, seeing the text as a consciously crafted piece of writing. Most displayed an engaging level of personal connection with the text, often bringing their own experience of the world to their reading in thoughtful and sometimes original ways. It was evident that all candidates made a good effort to do well on the paper, seeing the examination as an opportunity to demonstrate the skills that they had practised.

Many impressive answers were characterised by thoughtful consideration of the text and good planning. Plans need not be written out in detail on the answer booklet itself. Text-marking the question paper with underlining and brief annotation can prove equally beneficial and indeed provide a visual reminder to candidates to address the whole text, selecting pertinent sections for discussion in their answers. Well-organised answers were usually evident from the very first sentence where the key words of the question were often reiterated and linked to an overview of the content and writer’s intention in the text as a whole. These candidates were often able, then, to comment on the structure and movement of the text, analysing how its individual parts contributed to the impact of the whole. Less successful answers tended simply to repeat the question and bullet points, sometimes verbatim, or begin with a list of the many ‘ways’ (metaphor, simile, anaphora, sibilance, etc.) the writer uses to convey ideas, often with little or no connection to the text under discussion. These types of introductions produced comments that could be applied to any piece of crafted writing and shed no light on the text being examined, making it difficult for the examiner to reward work. Lists of technical terms in the introduction were often followed by a rather arid search for these

features in the text itself, often in a haphazard fashion, sometimes commenting on the caesura in the final stanza as an opening gambit to their response to the poem. More organised responses tended to begin with an overview, moving on to work through the poem or passage in sequence and were thus better able to comment on the developing effects of the writing on the reader.

Candidates should therefore be encouraged to spend time thinking about the text and planning their answers, and look upon this as a worthwhile investment of time in improving their chances of success in responding to unseen texts.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1 (Poetry)

The Lost Child by Sitor Situmorang

As mentioned in the General comments section, those candidates who spent time reading, thinking about and planning their responses tended to produce a more focused piece of work from the start. Those who did not allocate time in this way often fell back on the seemingly safer option of listing technical features which they felt could then be applied generically to any poem they met. In addition, the question was often copied out verbatim rather than echoing or paraphrasing the key words of the question as was seen in more effective introductions. Thus, many introductions ran along the following lines: "Through the use of punctuation, juxtaposition and diction the author conveys the feelings created by the return of the lost child to the village." This approach rarely proved beneficial as a starting point. A better approach was offered in responses where an emotional connection had been made with the poem and where 'feelings' had been identified as a key word in the question. Often effective were those that provided a brief overview of the 'story' of the poem and then succinctly summarised the *feelings* that were perceived within this. Responses of this kind often demonstrated a stronger focus on *feelings* throughout the entire essay, leading the discussion with an emotional response that could then be supported through judicious quotation and technical analysis. A dry search for technical features alone does not show an understanding of either text or task. In less successful responses, comments on language often came with little context, simply treating language analysis as an exercise in spotting the connotations of a word, regardless of whether or not these connotations were in keeping with the meaning of the poem or the task at hand. Generally, a sound introduction with a focus on the question was often indicative of clear, organised and focused thinking that was reflected in the rest of the response.

Most candidates were able to make some comment on the mother's nervous wait for the child on the beach. This was often seen as evidence of her feelings of love for her child and that she had been looking forward to his return. This was generally supported by apt quotation of *anxious mother*, *long-awaited* and *The moment he sets foot, mother embraces him*. Weaker responses tended to follow this with comments that merely reiterated the meaning of the quotation. It proved difficult to reward such comments, as simply repeating or paraphrasing the wording of the quotation does not demonstrate any real sense of understanding, interpretation or analysis of how meaning is constructed. Those who showed a measure of inference, through noting that the child must have been absent for a good length of time to create such anticipation, were more successful in showing that they had engaged with and understood the language. Good responses commented on the events unfolding through the perspective of the mother, with the boat first appearing as a *speck* and then growing closer as *The boat takes shape*. Strongest were those who further observed that the language here could point to the emotional distance between them. These visual images give the reader clear insight into the viewpoint of the mother and better responses were able to note and expand on this point. Some chose to comment on the *midday heat*, though often interpreted it as just 'sunny' so therefore happy; few appreciated that midday heat can be quite punishing and therefore perhaps the image provides a subtle dark note in the otherwise hopeful opening stanzas.

The contrast in the responses of the mother and father was noted by virtually all candidates, though not all went beyond the outward presentation of the father, simply noting that he *couldn't care less* and was therefore a bad or neglectful parent who hates his son. Those who noted the words *as if ...* at the start of the line and the following *but men know how to restrain their feelings* demonstrated that they had gone beyond surface meaning to look at more subtle considerations. This point appeared in many responses and there were some thoughtful comments on the cultural pressures on the father to be 'macho' or to show his masculine dominance by sitting *at the centre of the house*. Some commented that he may see the return of his son from the European city as a threat to his status as the head of the household – a valid response to what is suggested in the poem – linking this idea with the mention of *resentment* later on. In the same

stanza, the word *crestfallen* was often picked out as representing the boy's feelings, but few considered the deeper implication that this is a response to his father's perceived rejection of him.

The villagers were seen by most as inquisitive, annoying even, in their *bombardment* of personal questions about the boy's marital status and whether or not he had any children. Many could see that this question was repeated and discussed the presentation of the villagers as closing in on the boy, making him feel claustrophobic, although the questions were almost invariably identified as 'rhetorical questions', as if the villagers didn't really want an answer, contrary to previous comments about them. Candidates could be reminded that not all questions are automatically rhetorical though the writer may still be utilising them for a specific purpose, as is the case in this poem. The physical moving closer of the mother was successfully explained in some cases as representing her desire to get closer emotionally to her son and the repetition of *cold in Europe* was identified as an echo of the son's emotional coldness and inability to engage with his mother. This type of comment went a good way towards showing the candidate's grasp of the deeper implications of the language and imagery and often made for a strong response.

Many chose to end their discussions with a comment on the penultimate stanza, noting the resigned but benign silence of the mother and the fact that the lost child no longer fits in. Those candidates who allowed time for comment on the final stanza, however, opened up the opportunity to comment on the key image in the final two lines: *The waves swish on the beach. / They know the child has not returned.* At a surface level, the sibilance in the first of these two lines was noted as allowing the reader to be able to hear the sound of the waves, though some thoughtful responses probed further, seeing the tidal waves as an image of the passage of time, the thing that has stolen their child from them, or as a reminder of the sea, the thing that took their child away and that will probably do so again. *They* in the final line was sometimes seen as the parents themselves who know they will never see again the child they knew in the past: *They remember who he was but not who he is* as was aptly written in one response. A few observant answers saw *They* as referring to the waves, a natural force imbued with some sort of spiritual knowledge of the inevitability of loss and pain in human relationships. It is this type of sensitivity to language and imagery, clearly argued and supported by close reference to the poem, which allows candidates to access the higher levels of the mark scheme.

On the whole, candidates choosing the poetry option did not always appear to see the text as unfolding in any kind of ordered sequence, and some seemed content to plunge into the poem at any chosen point, moving backwards and forwards throughout the text to comment on features without any clear sense of organisation or order. Although selection of material from various points across the poem is helpful in making structural observations or to show repetition of a particular motif, a response that ranged across the whole poem without having established a reason for doing so or a thematic context for comments was often indicative of a 'feature spotting' approach. Though candidates should by no means be required, or indeed advised, to work uniformly through the poem line by line, they could be encouraged to move through the poem in the framework that it is presented to them on the page in order to demonstrate an understanding of the poem's structural movement and of the poet's development of ideas, often not crystallised until the final stanza.

Question 2 (Prose)

Beware of Pity by Stefan Zweig

The passage offered a good deal of material for exploration. Most made good use of the first two bullets in the question as a framework for their responses, examining the description of Dr Condor's appearance and the portrayal of Dr Condor's actions and speech. The opening paragraph of the passage was used as a starting point by most, and the rest of the extract was worked through in sequence as it unfolded. This approach allowed for comment on the narrator's growing irritation with Dr Condor to be noted as a structural feature of the text. All candidates quickly established that the narrator was not pleased with what he saw on first meeting the doctor in the flesh, noting the jarring disappointment with his imagined vision of him. Some started with the image that the narrator had created in his imagination: *an intellectual face, a sharp and penetrating eye, elegant bearing, sparkling and witty conversation*, noting that this image contrasted with his actual appearance as a *stocky, rather stout gentleman, short-sighted and with a bald patch, wearing a crumpled grey suit dusted with cigarette ash and with his tie carelessly arranged*. Weaker responses noted that this second quotation demonstrated the narrator's 'negative' feelings about the doctor because of the 'negative' language used about him; such generalisation did not fully demonstrate understanding of the writer's craft. Better answers moved back into the quotation, or quoted it in short, integrated segments, often commenting on individual terms or techniques; the *crumpled* nature of his suit suggests a man who has no care about his appearance and the *carelessly arranged* tie indicates that he spends no time on making an effort to present himself in a professional manner. The language used to describe the narrator's imagined

vision of Dr Condor was left unexplored by most – a missed opportunity to compare the impressions created by the contrasting language choices. Those who picked out pertinent words from the descriptions and who integrated them fluently into their discussions achieved a sharper focus on the language than those who used lengthy quotations verbatim from the text with little follow up on why they are significant. Candidates should, on the whole, be discouraged from using long quotations followed by ‘This shows ...’. It is often not clear what ‘This’ actually is when an individual word or phrase has not been singled out for particular attention.

Moving into the passage, the doctor’s ill manners and gluttony were the focus of most discussions. The phrase *hungry as a hunter* was identified by some as a simile and/or an example of alliteration and cited as indicative of the doctor’s lack of manners. This is fine as a basic response, but those who expanded on the quotation and commented on, perhaps, the colloquial nature of his speech, or the association of *hunter* with animalistic appetites were able then to demonstrate an understanding of the deeper implications of the writer’s choice of language here. The doctor’s sloppy manner of drinking his soup was regarded by many as off-putting for the narrator and his silence and absolute focus on eating and drinking were often seen as ‘rude’. The majority of answers attempted to develop these ideas further, and better answers turned their attention to the narrator’s description of the doctor’s eating habits as an *urgent operation*, engaging with the writer’s choice of *urgent* as particularly telling of the doctor’s uncouth attitude to eating, *demolishing* his food as quickly as possible. The dry irony of *operation* was picked up and explained with clarity by those who read the text closely. Stronger responses then related this to the narrator’s impression of Kekesfalva’s guest as being as far from the sophisticated surgeon he had imagined as could be possible.

In weaker responses, the remainder of the essay became something of an exercise in picking out salient parts of the text that they felt conveyed the narrator’s disgust with Dr Condor, weaving quotation – quite deftly at times – into their writing in a run through of the rest of the passage. This approach tended to lead to a rather narrative/descriptive style that lacked sharp analysis of the writing. Although the doctor’s gluttony and crude table manners were recognised and textual evidence was supplied, only those willing to engage in word-level analysis were able to pick apart in detail exactly how these impressions were conveyed in the writing. For example, the writer tells us that Condor helped himself *lavishly* from the dish, suggesting that he was piling food up on his plate, perhaps depriving others of their fair share, and that he *munched* his food, a word that suggests a crude, noisy style of eating, reflected in the enunciation of the word itself. The munching was described as being carried out with a *ponderous persistence* and, although some recognised the writer’s use of alliteration here, few commented on the effect created by the repeated ‘p’ sound of drawing the reader’s attention to the narrator’s growing irritation with the length of time the doctor was devoting to his food or his slow relish of it, or of the perceived vulgarity of the smacking of his lips whilst eating and drinking. In general, candidates could be encouraged to look more closely at individual words and short phrases in a close examination of how they achieve their effects in at least some parts of their responses.

The ending of the passage, with the relocation of the characters into the salon, drew attention from many who noted the doctor’s choice of the best armchair in the house and his helping himself to three of his host’s cigars as being particularly rude. Many commented on the fact that the narrator appeared to be becoming increasingly irritated with the doctor as the passage progressed and that he was now ‘obsessed’ with criticising him on every minor detail of his appearance and demeanour. This type of comment indicated an understanding of the benefit of looking at the passage in overview, taking note of its structural movement, in addition to analysis that focused the language alone. These *sharp-sighted* observations of the narrator (for example, the doctor’s socks flopping around his ankles), although noted by many, were recognised by more exploratory answers as being borne of his own *annoyance* and *bad temper* and those who could consider the narrator’s voice itself as having been constructed by the writer might have commented that the whole passage was presented through the narrator’s perspective, seen through the prism, perhaps, of his own prejudices. This reading was not really touched upon by candidates but would, if clearly explained, have made for some very strong personal engagement with the passage. A consideration, therefore, of ‘voice’ in text and of the idea that the narrator is often him/herself a constructed character in the narrative could be an area to be addressed with candidates in their preparation for dealing with unseen prose texts.

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Paper 0408/03
Paper 3: Set Text

Key messages

For success in this examination, candidates should:

- answer the question directly, addressing its key words from the start
- substantiate their responses with well-selected references from the text
- explore writers' techniques, the effects created by a writer's use of language, structure and form
- analyse the detail of extracts printed for **Section A** questions
- avoid extraneous background material that does not address the question.

General comments

There was a relatively small entry for the November 2016 session. Teachers new to the syllabus should consult the more detailed June 2016 report to assist with the planning and delivery of this syllabus.

Strong responses showed an impressive command of the detail of set text(s) and responded to the question throughout their answers. Less successful responses showed limited knowledge of key characters, themes and settings in their texts. Informed personal responses were those which convinced the reader of the validity of an interpretation by the use of careful substantiation. Even for the general **Section B** essays in this closed-book examination, the strongest responses offered a range of brief yet well-selected references (often in the form of learned direct quotation) to support their line of argument.

Candidates can limit their performance if they do not adhere to the question set. Some candidates worked through extracts in **Section A** by explaining the content rather than analysing precise effects in response to the questions. In some instances, candidates made little or no direct reference to their chosen extract in **Section A**; such an approach demonstrated a lack of understanding of the task. Regular practice of exploring the detail of texts (in speaking and listening activities, for example) should help candidates to develop their performance in this key area. Another indicator of a lack of critical awareness was the use of long, unexplored quotations or lists of short quotations (sometimes under the umbrella term 'semantic field'). These are not effective approaches to analysing *specific* effects with precision.

Comments on specific questions

Candidates in this series answered questions on Dai Sijie's *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress* and the Cambridge anthology *Stories of Ourselves*.

Section A

Question 2: Sijie

Successful responses explored the extract in detail. They grasped the comically malevolent intent of the buffalo attempting to crush Four-Eyes' spectacles and the pathetic figure cut by this 'timid, inexperienced master'. They explored the details of the effects of the re-education programme on all three boys and considered the portrayal of the boys with close reference to the writer's use of language in the extract, making much of the sickly Luo, the narrator's sense of caring towards the other two boys and the desperation of Four-Eyes not to be seen as weak by the peasantry. The significance of the discovery of the suitcase was understood by all who mentioned it, with the strongest responses linking its description (the 'ray of light' bouncing off it and the 'whiff of civilisation') with its wider importance in the rest of the novel.

Question 5: Stories of Ourselves

The strongest responses explored with some sensitivity the way in which the narrator's thoughts and feelings were captured as the extract progresses. There was the sense of awkwardness in the encounter between the narrator and Jim and of the humour in the gaucheness of the 13-year-old eating an ice-cream as he was shown around the factory. A contrast was often made between the parents in their reactions to their son, the comic strip artist. Less successful responses worked through the extract offering an explanation of surface meanings rather than any comment on how the writer is crafting the text. Some of the more successful answers considered the aptness of the story's title, 'My Greatest Ambition', and the sense of the narrator's resignation in the final two sentences: 'The only thing that was ever real to me I had "grown out of". I had become, like everyone else, a dreamer.' In exploring the detail of the passage and linking it to the wider text, candidates were able to demonstrate a high level of knowledge and understanding.

Section B

Question 7: Sijie

Successful responses charted the portrayal of the narrator through the novel. The contrast with Luo at the beginning was often a starting-point for responses: the narrator was regarded as more thoughtful and less audacious than Luo, whose quick thinking in saving the bourgeois violin was admired by the narrator. There was much consideration of the latter's intellectual and emotional development through the influence of literature, with its emphasis on personal independence and unfettered thinking (which was contrasted with the constraints imposed by re-education). Most responses at all levels made some comment on the practical support offered, at some risk to himself, in procuring the illegal abortion for the Little Seamstress. Most successful were those responses that supported points with carefully selected textual detail and that responded to the ways in which Sijie 'vividly conveys' the narrator's maturity.

Question 10: Stories of Ourselves

Too few responses were seen to make meaningful comment.