

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 8695/21

Writing

Key Messages

The questions differentiated a range of candidates successfully, with answers ranging from the very mature and thoughtful to those marred by significant lapses in technical accuracy. At the high end, there were a good number of highly imaginative and engaging narrative/descriptive responses in Section A; and sophisticated and strongly purposeful argumentative/discursive compositions in Section B. These fluent and mature responses, as ever, were a delight to read and very impressive, considering the time constraints under which they were produced. At the lower end of the range, answers tended to rely on undirected, drifting or undeveloped plots, with lapses in technical areas and expression. The usual areas of concern emerged: tenses commonly confused; the incorrect use of punctuation in dialogue, especially with speech marks; evidence of 'prepared' answers that did not quite fit the examination questions. On the whole, there were not many rubric infringements and time management seemed satisfactory.

General Comments

The majority of candidates made real efforts to meet the prescribed task. A number needed to address the question focus and consider the nature of the guidelines of the task in Section A, e.g. prescribed instructions such as 'futuristic and mysterious environment', 'colours and sounds'; or a prescribed form/structure: a descriptive piece of writing or an 'opening' to a short story.

The candidates' sense of audience, form and purpose in Section B was convincing on the whole: candidates were prepared well in terms of appropriate register, form and tone for such tasks as a debate or a magazine or web article. One area for improvement is to use two different tones in speeches opposing each other, and not keep to the same sort of 'voice' for the two.

Comments on Specific Questions

Section A

Question 1

The Theme Park was a less popular question but a good one in that there are possible discriminators between 'specific' approaches and the generalised appreciation of a day out. Stronger responses created a strong flavour of child-like excitement and wonder; often incorporating smells along with 'sights and sounds', thus helping to create an imaginative scene. Descriptive contrasts could also be shown through emotions of participants. Weaker responses struggled to maintain the descriptive nature of the task and drifted to narrative or away from the question stem of colours and sounds. Some weaker responses started with preparing for the day when the responses needed to begin *in medias res*, to get to the focus quickly.

Question 2

The Witness saw some very good answers with a sharp focus on a 'historical incident'. Stronger responses offered clear signposting as to specific nature of the incident. These were fluent narratives showing interaction between different characters who were responding to incident; or tightly controlled parallel narratives between character's experience and 'real or imaginary' social/political narrative. Some candidates explored events from distant history, for example, the conquistador's arrival in America from the perspective of a young child. More able candidates grasped the concept of the minor character's perspective. Weaker responses indulged in self-centred suffering narratives, usually about 9/11 or presidential assassinations. Less successful candidates struggled with the concept of a story opening and wanted to retell the whole historical event.

Cambridge International Advanced Subsidiary Level
8695 Language and Literature in English November 2014
Principal Examiner Report for Teachers

Question 3

'A set of keys, a passport, a credit card...' was a very popular question. There was lots of scope for a narrative. Character and setting prompts were well used by candidates. Kidnap narratives were popular here, as were detective investigation stories which were well told and which obviously fed from their knowledge of film and TV. Some displayed a very good ear for dialogue too, though punctuation and direct speech could have been better. Some strongly structured narratives added suspense/mystery to 'character/setting', with the three items linking fluently to different sections of narratives. Less successful responses were commonly self-centred narrator-only plotlines involving a woebegone character left stranded by a lover/friend or parents, with no connections between the given opening and the narrative.

Section B

Question 4

'My Favourite Walk' was popular but was often not about an identifiable walk in many cases. Few really grasped the demands of the question stem – for visitors and less well-known places or the favourite walk. Candidates seemed to focus on a business/economic lexis and content and this frequently usurped the promotional element of the question. Responses tended to be structured around cameos of popular sites. Perhaps candidates were too focused on generalised 'travel magazine' article, giving generalised descriptions of city, or surrounding areas (impossible to walk), writing in advert/blurb mode – all very excited argue/persuade travel *brochure* attempts. There were however some pleasing ideas: less well-known restaurants, and hidden beaches. Some candidates responded with persuasive material for a popular hotel or describing somewhere they used to play as a child (the pond behind the church). Where candidates did more fully understand the task, there was a pleasing amount of descriptive and persuasive writing.

Question 5

This was not a popular choice. In general the scripts on the question, *Are Standards Rising or Falling?* were not particularly strong. Candidates responded to this question in a somewhat formulaic way: technological distractions, unmotivated candidates and teachers, difficult examinations. Technical issues seemed to detract from what might otherwise have been stronger responses. Stronger response explored moral and philosophical ideas.

Question 6

On the whole candidates responded comprehensively to the question on *Keeping Up to Date*, although they tended to be formulaic – time, cost, features/sites, disadvantages. Weaker answers failed to write for an older audience even when the content and expression were secure. Candidates tended to be more fluent in this response than Section A but language features were less apparent and rarely moved beyond rhetorical questions and listing. Stronger responses did however employ some effective imagery and voices that were sensitive to an older audience.

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 8695/22

Writing

Key Messages

The questions differentiated a range of candidates successfully, with answers ranging from the very mature and thoughtful to those marred by significant lapses in technical accuracy. At the high end, there were a good number of highly imaginative and engaging narrative/descriptive responses in Section A, and mature and strongly purposeful argumentative/discursive compositions in Section B. These fluent and mature responses, as ever, were a delight to read and very impressive, considering the time constraints in which they were produced. At the lower end of the range, answers tended to rely on undirected, drifting or undeveloped plots, with lapses in technical areas and expression. The usual areas of concern emerged: tenses commonly confused, the incorrect use of punctuation in dialogue (especially with speech marks), and evidence of 'prepared' answers that did not quite fit the examination question. On the whole, there were not many rubric infringements and time management seemed satisfactory.

General Comments

The majority of candidates made real efforts to meet the prescribed task. A number needed to address the question focus and consider the nature of the guidelines of the task in Section A, e.g. prescribed instructions such as 'futuristic and mysterious environment', 'colours and sounds', or a prescribed form/structure: a descriptive piece of writing or an 'opening' to a short story.

The candidates' sense of audience, form and purpose in Section B was convincing on the whole. Candidates were prepared well in terms of appropriate register, form and tone for such tasks as a script for a podcast, debate or a magazine article. One area for improvement is to use two different tones in speeches opposing each other, and not keep to the same sort of 'voice' for the two.

Comments on Specific Questions

Section A

Question 1

Robot World was a very popular choice, which allowed candidates to show a great deal of creativity and imagination. There was a wide range in the quality of responses. The majority of candidates were able to demonstrate their writing skills, showing flair in their choice of vocabulary and use of figurative language techniques, but unfortunately quite a number were rather pedestrian. Some missed the 'opening to a story' aspect of the question, resulting in rather unvaried descriptive pieces, which hit the 'futuristic/mysterious' aspect of the rubric, but which were most unconvincing as openings for a story and often lacked any clear narrative control. Although a number of candidates were able to construct a sense of a futuristic environment, many were not so successful in creating a sense of mystery. A large number of clichés were used and many responses involving robots taking over the world after being created by a 'mad' scientist. Many responses had the scenario that humans were prisoners to the robots. Time travel featured quite a lot. Almost all responses had flying cars and servant robots to create a futuristic scene. More imaginative responses involved fascinating dystopian societies and a mysterious environment whereby the protagonist was working 'underground' to provide a solution to the robot takeover. Most candidates were able to write for the purpose. There was, in the most part, a good balance between description and dialogue.

Question 2

'*The buildings seemed to waken as daylight dawned...*' was quite a popular question, though many candidates struggled to maintain the descriptive nature of the task and drifted to narrative or away from the

question stem of colours and sounds. However stronger answers did attend to the prompt, leading to some pleasing descriptive imagery. Weaker responses also struggled to structure this task with description, leaping from one element to another, whilst stronger answers structured the writing around a journey or from particular viewpoint: a balcony, tree or in one case the perspective of a homeless man. The better responses brought in some personal voice and experience. Stronger responses involved often day-long musings, giving a strong arc of structure; or constructed imaginative re-creations of city life with a variety of vignettes of movement and/or scenarios involving contrasts in 'colours and sounds'; or created engaging descriptions of personified or metaphoric parallel existences. Weak responses were mostly lists of described objects with colours and sounds labelled without any exploration of effects, and where there was very little connection between the given opening and the rest of the response; or an excuse to indulge in narrative waking-up procedures leading to unconnected stories, often with only the narrator as character. Quite a number of candidates did not pick up the prompt that this was the start of the day, starting their writing from sunset. Many very quickly moved to the setting of the seaside and some ignored the given setting completely.

Question 3

Not many candidates attempted this question, *the opening to a short story in which some of the people and events from a well-known book or film are seen from the perspective of one of the less significant characters or film*. Candidates struggled with the concept of a story opening and wanted to retell the whole story. There were a surprising number of fairy tales and popular films. More able responses showed a firm grasp of the concept of a minor character's perspective, for example Mr Charrington in *1984*. They effectively structured in terms of selecting some scenes which showed the relationship of the less significant to the major character; clear signposting as to why the particular storyline was important, thus maintaining a strong sense of voice of characters. Less successful answers were less observational, and a number were clichéd narratives that could fit almost any film; or were simple linear narratives without much insight into the character's point-of-view. It was sometimes hard to know which film/book was being targeted and it would have been useful if candidates had added a footnote to explain their choice.

Section B

Question 4

On the whole candidates responded comprehensively to the question on *Keeping in Touch*, although they tended to be formulaic – time, cost, features/sites, disadvantages. Less assured responses failed to write for an older audience even when the content and expression was secure. Centres should have this right by now. The audience can be identified by their children, or grandchildren or their professions, which would instantly and neatly identify the audience. Some assumed that older means ancient. There was some third person address to 'old people' who were assumed not to understand social media anyway; or a generalised guide to the wonders of Facebook/Twitter and so on to a fairly general audience; or simple listings of devices without recourse to targeting readership; or adverts for products rather than subtle mix of explain/persuade. There was also some drifting away from social networking to search engines like Google. Language features were less apparent and rarely moved beyond rhetorical questions and listing, with the less successful answers. The 'practical' element of the question was not well covered although it was a gift of a question – candidates know a lot about the topic and are able to navigate their way around technical aspects. Stronger responses did however employ some effective imagery and voices that were sensitive to an older audience, or managed clear exposition without patronising the readership; gave well-structured advice with clear headings or discourse markers; or offered well-shaped ideas with a thoughtful introduction/conclusion indicating re-assurance.

Question 5

Secret Places was the least popular question and when it was answered, there were mixed results. Few really grasped the demands of the question stem – for locals/new visitors and less well-known places. Responses tended to be structured around cameos of popular sites, a guide on their home cities rather than less well-known locations, digressions into narrative ramblings about personal relationships to places without considering audience's 'interest and enjoyment'; advert or blurb mode merely. These candidates touched on popular ideas such as trips to the beach and particular restaurants rather than the unusual. There were however some pleasing ideas: less known restaurants, and hidden beaches. Where candidates did more fully understand the task, there was a pleasing amount of descriptive and persuasive writing. It was a chance for better candidates to distinguish themselves by discriminating between 'local' and 'new visitors', by using realistic podcast language and conventions and presenting a judicious selection of places with fluent connecting reasons.

Question 6

The Rights Workers Should Have was quite a popular question with some interesting and lively issues raised. Almost all candidates were able to show two points of view and show them in the form of a speech. But quite a few responses tended to talk about 'rights' without specifying what rights they wanted to achieve. The fact that the question asked first for the director's speech meant that most tackled that first. Those who started with the worker's speech were often more convincing, because that then gave scope for the director to explain why some of the workers' demands were unrealistic, though stronger responses involved the individual opinion of second speaker, not solely based on reply to first speaker. Social, political, economic or moral dimensions were integrated, using rhetorical devices to show 'opposing viewpoints and attitudes'. Less successful answers merely listed points in the same order for both speakers; clichéd putting-bread-on-the-table working-class types reacting to posh patronising bosses (though subtle elements of this dynamic were useful).

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 8695/23

Writing

Key Messages

The questions differentiated a range of candidates successfully, with answers ranging from the very mature and thoughtful to those marred by significant lapses in technical accuracy. At the high end, there were a good number of highly imaginative and engaging narrative/descriptive responses in Section A; and sophisticated and strongly purposeful argumentative/discursive compositions in Section B. These fluent and mature responses, as ever, were a delight to read and very impressive, considering the time constraints under which they were produced. At the lower end of the range, answers tended to rely on undirected, drifting or undeveloped plots, with lapses in technical areas and expression. The usual areas of concern emerged: tenses commonly confused; the incorrect use of punctuation in dialogue, especially with speech marks; evidence of 'prepared' answers that did not quite fit the examination questions. On the whole, there were not many rubric infringements and time management seemed satisfactory.

General Comments

The majority of candidates made real efforts to meet the prescribed task. A number needed to address the question focus and consider the nature of the guidelines of the task in Section A, e.g. prescribed instructions such as 'futuristic and mysterious environment', 'colours and sounds'; or a prescribed form/structure: a descriptive piece of writing or an 'opening' to a short story.

The candidates' sense of audience, form and purpose in Section B was convincing on the whole: candidates were prepared well in terms of appropriate register, form and tone for such tasks as script for a voiceover, debate or website article. One area for improvement is to use two different tones in speeches opposing each other, and not keep to the same sort of 'voice' for the two.

Comments on Specific Questions

Section A

Question 1

The Witness was not a very popular choice, but there were a few strong responses to this question. Character and motivation were well observed in the more successful answers, some of which involved car accidents or murders. Some less successful candidates found the character and motivation part of the rubric a bit difficult to weave in. The 'opening to a story' rubric was often a problem for candidates. Less successful responses appeared to be 'borrowed' from films, or were only very loosely based on the idea of a witness.

Question 2

A short story ending with '*Spring had arrived...*' was not attempted by many candidates. The problem for some candidates with this question was that they seemed to have used a pre-prepared story which did not necessarily fit convincingly with the ending. Examiners had the impression that prepared stories had this ending bolted onto the conclusion which, therefore, omitted the 'setting and mood' focus of the task. However there was scope for candidates to produce well-written stories. Stories which had a season focus were more successful. Some used the ending as a metaphorical springtime.

Question 3

The Factory was by far the most popular choice in Section A. This produced very good, strong work. Some excellent answers were found where candidates used their full panoply of descriptive material: sound, colour

and even texture were very strongly represented, assisted by effective paragraphing, and sometimes by the structure of a journey through different parts of the factory. Very few fell into the narrative trap. Interestingly, a couple of candidates chose to describe the workings of a bee-hive – one of them, in particular, producing a really strong piece.

Section B

Question 4

Most of the candidates who chose *Reasons to Invest Here* seemed to have a good awareness of business matters. This was generally very well done, although not too popular a question. Candidates may have been discouraged by the script for a voiceover. Less successful responses were lacking in development. Successful answers ranged through a number of reasons for investing – from sound political and economic policies, landscape, market opportunities, and infrastructure – and developed those reasons well. Persuasive devices were used to good effect.

Question 5

Scientific Research Should Have its Limits was a very popular question and mostly well done. The contrasting voice was well served by the candidates. Examiners were impressed by the ability of some to present two detailed and compelling positions at the same time. However, some focussed solely on animal testing, and confined their arguments to pharmaceutical/cosmetic research; others on the space race, and yet others on the arms race – instead of opening up the array of possibilities this question offered. More successful answers ranged through a host of different areas, which made their arguments convincing.

Question 6

Safe and Sound was by far the most popular question in Section B and generally very well done, apart from one or two less successful answers which just kept encouraging the reader to travel, overlooking the practical advice aspect of the rubric. Unfortunately, the website element was largely ignored. However, with the successful responses, pleasures and difficulties were presented in equal measure. Here candidates focussed on the audience really well and directly to their peers. Successful responses covered both the guidance and advice aspect of the question.

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 8695/91
Poetry, Prose and Drama

Key Messages

- All questions are a test of literary knowledge and understanding and as such, must be informed by an analysis of the text.
- Candidates succeed best when they use secure detailed references and quotations to support points.
- The most successful answers clearly focus on the author's choices of language and literary methods, and the effects these have on a reader.
- Answers to **(b)** passage questions should examine the selected extract in detail and demonstrate an awareness of the wider text.

General Comments

There was an interesting variety in the texts which proved popular across the three time zoned papers, but throughout the range, examiners saw examples of excellent, detailed and informed writing on all of the texts. Within the different genres there was evidence of thoughtful and precise analysis of poetic methods across the range of poetry texts, and some candidates showed impressively comprehensive knowledge of their chosen novels. Amongst those choosing drama on the Language and Literature question papers, there was evidence of an informed appreciation of the dramatic genre and the plays were understood as performances on stage. There were, though, many answers which were hampered by summary and paraphrase. In such responses, knowledge was often shown, but demonstration of understanding of the writers' choices of language, imagery and form was missing. It is very important that answers balance knowledge and understanding.

Question Specific Comments

Question 1

Seamus Heaney: *District and Circle*

- (a) There were very few responses to this question, which gave candidates an opportunity to write about ways in which Heaney uses landscape in his poems and explore the significance he attaches to items of agricultural machinery.
- (b) There was a small number of responses to this question, among which some candidates showed an understanding of how Heaney creates a colloquial voice in the first stanza and uses vivid, active verbs to convey a sense of violence in the unexpected. Several candidates linked the poem to the destruction of the Twin Towers on 9/11 but this was often done without sufficient textual analysis of the details of the poem and Heaney's poetic choices.

Question 2

Wilfred Owen: *Selected Poems*

- (a) Most responses to this question relied on Owen's two most famous poems, 'Anthem for Doomed Youth' and 'Dulce et Decorum Est' and often provided stock essays on these poems without clearly addressing the actual question. Stronger answers directly considered how Owen's choices of language and imagery present the brutality of warfare in an uncompromising way to challenge

ignorant or misinformed views. Enterprising responses went beyond these to two poems and also considered, for example, the Biblical parody of 'The Parable of the Old Man and the Young', the results of war in 'Disabled' or the soldiers' experience in 'Exposure'.

- (b) While there were some overly literal readings of 'The Last Laugh', including candidates who wrote that the central stanza refers to the death of a young child, most candidates noted ways in which Owen presents elements of warfare mocking the deaths of soldiers. For example, examining such verb choices as 'chuckled', 'guffawed', 'tittered' and 'grinned'. This led some candidates to consider some of the other ironies in the poem, such as the juxtaposition of 'childlike' and 'dead' and the fate of the young man who 'kissed the mud' instead of his lover. While the three stanzas recounting the stories of three soldiers was noted, very few looked at the stanzas in combination or considered the linking between 'Jesus Christ', 'Mother' 'Dad' and 'My Love'.

Question 3

Songs of Ourselves

- (a) There were very few responses to this question, although the selection provides a wealth of material.
- (b) There was a larger number of responses to this question, although overall few candidates answered on the anthology. Successful answers required a very detailed consideration of its language and form. Nearly all answers recognised Raleigh's central metaphor in the poem, although many found selecting and analysing its details more challenging.

Question 4

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: *Half of a Yellow Sun*

- (a) Although the issue raised by this question is central to the novel, it attracted very few answers.
- (b) Candidates overwhelmingly preferred the passage question and generally responded well to it. Most were able to place the extract in context and had a solid understanding of Richard's role in the novel. Less confident answers gave a largely narrative account of the passage, but sharper responses noted Richard's identification with Biafra and his growing anger with the journalists. Strong answers noted that the narrative shows Richard's point of view, while the journalists are anonymous, identified by their physical details and judged by their dialogue. Their presumptions and casual racism were noted in many answers, showing that while Richard is angered by them, they also reinforce his helplessness in raising awareness about the war in the outside world.

Question 5

EM Forster: *A Passage to India*

- (a) There were very few responses to this question and several answers comprised largely narrative summary without clearly focusing on the 'significance' in the question. More confident responses showed an appreciation of the cost of the withdrawal for Adela, isolated from the English community, and the freedom for Aziz which ultimately breeds bitterness and discord between him and Fielding, raising key questions about relationships between Indians and the English.
- (b) The selected passage question was the more popular, where strong answers looked closely not just at what is said in the dialogue, but at the tone of the language used, in this way revealing characterisation. Candidates were able to comment on the openness of Adela and Mrs Moore, who ask open questions and gently puncture the attitudes of the Club – noting Mrs Moore's 'gentle but crooked smile', for example. Alert responses went beyond simplistic assertions of racism to explore the colonial attitudes in more detail, looking at the variety of attitudes expressed. Such answers also used the context well, with reference to the ensuing Bridge Party and the brief early glimpse of Fielding, whose three word comment at the beginning of the passage is a precursor to his developing characterisation.

Question 6

Stories of Ourselves

- (a) This was a popular question, enabling a wide choice of stories; the most popular were 'The Hollow of the Three Hills', 'The Lady in the Looking Glass: A Reflection', 'The Bath' and 'Elephant', though several others also featured. Many candidates showed knowledge of the stories, though answers were frequently narrative and did not attempt to look at ways in which the states of mind are presented. The quality of the answers very much depended on the use of textual references and choice of apposite episodes. Successful candidates made the connection between discussing the characters' state of mind and the narrative methods used. The dreams and visions in 'The Hollow of the Three Hills' and 'Elephant' were used effectively, as were the exploration of the old lady's thoughts in 'The Bath' and the metaphor of reflection in 'The Lady in the Looking Glass'.
- (b) Mr Mitra's response to the ceremony was often handled very well. Most candidates had a secure grasp and were able to make selections to show his boredom and anger (the throwing off the shoes) at having to attend. Responses offering some insight into the language were most successful, noting the suggestions of Mr Mitra's feelings through his behaviour and observations in the earlier part of the passage before the explicit statement 'He felt bored' at the beginning of the final paragraph of the extract. Several answers related some of his discomfort at the awkward nature of this particular shradh ceremony because of the circumstances of Anjalis' death and the fact that he did not really know his 'wife's distant relation'. Several candidates offered a postcolonial reading of the passage, noting the description of western-style furniture and references to foreign engineering firms juxtaposed with the shradh ceremony and the singing of a Brahmo sangeet, though such responses often relied on material outside the passage.

Question 7

Edward Albee: *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*

- (a) Very few responses. Most dealt with the play as a whole or focused on Nick and Honey's relationship rather than George and Martha's. Few showed a detailed knowledge of the play.
- (b) Very few responses, which were sometimes able to comment on the significance of the episode, but without the detail needed to show an understanding of Albee's dramatic methods.

Question 8

William Shakespeare: *Richard III*

- (a) Most responses to this question offered a narrative of Richard's actions in the course of the play without considering how Shakespeare presents those changes in his language and the changes to relationships around his character. The question's reference to 'effects' was also missing from many answers. More successful answers considered Richard's early confidence with the audience and the showmanship of his villainy in the first part of the play, developing through his reliance on Buckingham then his misjudgement of Elizabeth. Most mentioned his psychological torment evident in act five scene three before his final defeat. The strongest responses showed detailed knowledge of the play with precise quotations to support points made.
- (b) Many responses showed a good appreciation of this scene, noting that Buckingham's strenuous efforts to win support for Richard are not successful in this instance. Those answers which did not go much further than this, relying on paraphrase, were not very successful. More focused responses noted that the question was about the relationship between Richard and Buckingham and commented that Buckingham dominates the dialogue; Richard is reduced to asking questions and responding to Buckingham's imperatives. In this way, Richard's reliance on Buckingham's political skills is made evident, as is Buckingham's loyalty as he seeks to help Richard to the throne. Expressing these ideas required careful analysis of Shakespeare's shaping of the dialogue in the selected passage rather than just giving an account of the content of the speeches.

Question 9

Robert Bolt: *A Man for All Seasons*

- (a) Most responses dealt with Norfolk through the other characters and offered well-considered thoughts not only on his significance but also his motivation. Some responses simply commented on his ignorance, usually referring to his unread library, without necessarily considering the 'significance' of his character as required by the question.
- (b) Most responses tended to focus on More's ability to keep his own counsel and made reference to other parts of the play where the same central characteristic is shown. Many noted the foreshadowing metaphor of the blackness of the river in the extract, better answers relating it to the whole play, sometimes using the comment regarding the boatman's wife losing her shape to extend the metaphor. Some candidates successfully recognised the context of the extract and were able to identify the roles of Cromwell, More, the Common Man as the Boatman, and Chapuys. Many answers, however, were general, focusing sometimes on More throughout the play, or explaining the historical background to the divorce. Successful responses depended on close engagement with the text, most obviously the dialogue, but also ways in which the stage directions give strong subtextual suggestions.

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 8695/92

Poetry, Prose and Drama

Key Messages

- All questions are a test of literary knowledge and understanding and as such, must be informed by an analysis of the text.
- Candidates succeed best when they use secure detailed references and quotations to support points.
- The most successful answers clearly focus on the author's choices of language and literary methods, and the effects these have on a reader.
- Answers to **(b)** passage questions should examine the selected extract in detail and demonstrate an awareness of the wider text.

General Comments

There was an interesting variety in the texts which proved popular across the three time zoned papers, but throughout the range, examiners saw examples of excellent, detailed and informed writing on all of the texts. Within the different genres there was evidence of thoughtful and precise analysis of poetic methods across the range of poetry texts, and some candidates showed impressively comprehensive knowledge of their chosen novels. Amongst those choosing drama on the Language and Literature question papers, there was evidence of an informed appreciation of the dramatic genre and the plays were understood as performances on stage. There were, though, many answers which were hampered by summary and paraphrase. In such responses, knowledge was often shown, but demonstration of understanding of the writers' choices of language, imagery and form was missing. It is very important that answers balance knowledge and understanding.

Question Specific Comments

Question 1

Seamus Heaney: *District and Circle*

- (a) There were few responses to this question, but among them poems such as 'The Turnip-Snedder', 'A Shiver', 'Helmet' and 'A Clip' were discussed. Some essays were restricted to an account of the object, with some indication of its importance to the speaker of the poem, while stronger answers took note of the word 'develops' in the question and looked at ways in which Heaney's language and structure establish and build the significance of the chosen object, often through the suggestions of metaphor or association.
- (b) Among the few responses on 'The Blackbird of Glanmore', there were not many 'proficient' or 'very good' essays. Some candidates were aware of biographical information and were able to identify the 'lost brother', while others noted the 'arrive' at the beginning of the poem and the 'leave' at the end. There was little detailed engagement with the whole poem to show understanding of its content and methods of communication. There were opportunities to discuss the poem's treatment of memories at the speaker's arrival home through the pattern of the stanzas, the clipped, almost staccato lines, the lines of translation and from the neighbour, and the presentation of the blackbird itself.

Question 2

Wilfred Owen: *Selected Poems*

- (a) There were many responses to this question and most candidates were able to comment quite fully on ways in which Owen's poetry would have informed and disturbed its audience at the time of the war; those who used 'Dulce et Decorum Est' were able to refer directly to 'the old lie'. This poem, with 'Anthem for Doomed Youth', were the most popular choices, but strong answers also used poems such as 'Disabled', 'The Send-Off', 'Mental Cases' and 'Exposure' among others. Success generally depended on how well candidates knew their chosen poems and how effectively they could analyse how Owen's choices of language and imagery create effects and generate responses. The most successful essays argued that through portraying the horrors and brutality of war, ranging from the pain, suffering, bloodshed, hostile conditions and loss of young life on the battlefield to the physical and psychological, emotional and mental traumas of the survivors, Owen confronts the heartless complacency of propagandists, higher officials, political leaders and even other poets, who remain oblivious to the damage and destruction caused by the war. Less successful responses wrote generally about Owen as an anti-war poet, without referring to and analysing the poetry.
- (b) 'The Dead-Beat' proved to be a good discriminator, producing some excellent detailed responses, but also some general unfocused writing which demonstrated insecure knowledge and whose title was often not understood. Successful answers discussed the different views of the mental breakdown of the exhausted soldier apparent in the development of the whole poem: the dehumanising, cynical view by the narrator and other fellow soldiers, considering the striking similes in the second line; the sympathetic view of a comrade with a 'soft voice' aware of the soldier's personal problems back at home; the cynical, mocking view of the stretcher-bearers and finally the ridicule and disrespect of a heartless, drinking doctor. The colloquial language of the 'low voice' was a key – candidates who recognised it noted the sympathy and the ironies, while those who missed the direct speech misunderstood the import of the second stanza.

Question 3

Songs of Ourselves

- (a) This question prompted a large number and a wide range of responses. Most candidates were confident with the content of the poems and sometimes made heartfelt, personal comments on the transitory nature of love. The key discriminator was the way answers demonstrated an understanding of the effects of the poets' choices of diction, imagery and form, which eluded many candidates. Some of the most successful answers were those which selected poems which contrasted in some way and used the differences to structure the essay. Differences included gender of the speaker, the tone of the response to lost love, the speaker's voice or chosen form for the poem. The range of poems in the anthology offered plenty of scope. Where candidates were able to show some grasp of the conventions of Renaissance poetry, discuss the use of the sonnet form or pay close attention to choices of language and metaphor, answers were strong, but many responses relied on paraphrase or narrative summary.
- (b) This too was a popular question and elicited a range of answers. There were some literal readings, but most responses showed an understanding of the poem's central metaphor and some candidates analysed its detail and development with considerable care and perception. There were occasions when some of the archaic diction was not understood, but most had at least a solid grasp of the poem. Strong answers noted the intimate tone of the poem and its self-deprecation which disguises the speaker's wish for her poems to endure. She hopes that no one will think her presumptuous if her poems give pleasure, hopes that at least they will give no offence, cause no harm and will be appreciated after her death. There was a handful of sexual readings which were not successfully convincing.

Question 4

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: *Half of a Yellow Sun*

- (a) Though this question did not attract a large number of responses, it was often done very well. Such answers were wide ranging and thoughtful, drawing on a variety of different episodes that showed 'death' in its widest sense – not just loss of life but death of the spirit, death of hope and ambition, death of morality, community and religion. There was effective use of the white perspective as shown through the journalists and through Susan, showing how the author put faces to those who 'were silent', as well as accounts of the wider world's lack of support for Biafra. Many of these responses acknowledged the source of the title and commented on Richard's choice, but the importance of it being Ugwu's book.
- (b) This passage was a very popular question, and as is common with prose passage questions, attracted many answers. However, many progressed little beyond paraphrase of the events and general comment. There were, however, many detailed and thoughtful responses which looked closely at Adichie's 'ways' of presenting 'Ugwu's growing unease'. Successful essays noted that Adichie uses a third person narrative focused on Ugwu's interpretation of events, his behaviour, his physical reactions and his conversations. They noted, for example, that Ugwu seeks support for his fears from his fellow servant, Jomo, and his master Odenigbo. Both the uneducated gardener and the educated intellectual dismiss his fears, Jomo with sarcasm and Odenigbo with science. Fruitful examination of the dialogue with Odenigbo showed how Adichie presents Ugwu's persistence and incomprehension that no-one takes him seriously. Strong responses noted that Ugwu at this stage of the novel is still the uneducated village boy, a believer in bad medicine who is fearful of his position if Olanna is replaced. Developed answers looked closely at the narrative and language to show Ugwu's developing fears. A few subtle answers looked at Adichie's ambiguity in the passage, where rational explanations are not fully convincing and Ugwu's fears seem to be vindicated by Mama's 'ominously victorious' tone and the sight of Amala emerging from Odenigbo's room.

Question 5

EM Forster: *A Passage to India*

- (a) Answers which relied on narrative, often retelling the occasion of the alleged assault, were not successful and did not consider the 'significance' of the caves to the novel. However, many candidates were confident with the material and successfully treated the Marabar Caves incident as a catalyst for the relationships between Indians and their British rulers. Successful candidates demonstrated a sophisticated appreciation of how Forster used the caves to present the spiritual gulf between religions and races and to symbolise the failure to bridge that gulf even by those with the very best of intentions. Discussion of the symbolic value of the caves featured in many answers, representing the mystery, muddle, and spirituality of India. Forster's ambiguous descriptions of the caves, as well as the events within them, often featured in strong responses.
- (b) Many candidates saw in this question an opportunity to discuss the relationship between Fielding and Aziz within the novel, but it was the stronger responses which focused that discussion closely on the selected extract, carefully considering its position at the end of the novel. These were able to show clear and intelligent analysis of the tones of the two speakers – Aziz voluble and passionate, Fielding mocking and sceptical – through Forster's third person narrative, indirect reported thought and direct speech. The passage presented many opportunities for such comments on the details of the narrative, including the setting, descriptions of the two men and the horses, which featured in the strongest answers. A thoughtful evaluation of the significance of the passage as an ending to the novel required such considerations of style, as well as content.

Question 6

Stories of Ourselves

- (a) A wide range of stories which present fear were used by candidates, including 'Sredni Vashtar', 'The Moving Finger', 'The Lady in the Looking-Glass: A Reflection', 'The Enemy' and 'The Bath' among others, though not all with equal success. Narrative summary and an account of why characters were afraid was the main weakness of less successful responses, but stronger answers showed not only good knowledge, but a thoughtful understanding of ways in which that fear is presented to, and sometimes invoked in, the reader. The gothic setting and fearful visions in

Hawthorne's story were often dealt with successfully, while some interesting answers looked at the fear of isolation expressed by the narrator of 'Elephant'. Many candidates responded particularly well to 'The Bath', showing sensitivity and insight when discussing Frame's exploration of the old lady's mind as she struggles with her infirmity and everyday actions.

- (b) In the most successful answers, candidates centred their discussion around the key idea of 'a struggle between two wills', a shifting power struggle between mother and son in a complex and volatile family situation. Many also argued that all their battles were on the surface and there are examples of mutual concern in the passage, exploring some of the ambiguities in Naipaul's presentation. Responses which contextualised the passage to augment a close focus on its detail showed a more informed and a nuanced understanding of the relationship. Often candidates considered the mother's criticisms of her son because of her previous challenges and insecurities, with the boy's resentment and defiance being seen as a result of the absence of a once more supportive relationship with his father. Strong answers considered the effects of the partial view of the first person narrator in the story's presentation of events.

Question 7

Edward Albee: *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*

- (a) There were very few answers on this text, and nearly all candidates who had studied it chose to respond to this question. Answers concentrated on Martha's flirtations with Nick and the revelation of Honey's phantom pregnancy and drunkenness. Stronger responses looked carefully at how these issues contribute to the dramatic tension of the play, looking at ways in which the dynamic of the evening eventually causes changes to Nick and Honey's relationship. Successful answers were based on careful selection of references to particular episodes, supported by quotations in order to examine Albee's dramatic methods, while less successful responses tended to narrate events of the evening from Nick and Honey's perspective.
- (b) There were very few responses to this rich passage, which crystallises some of the debate about science and the arts in the play. Answers could have looked at George's domination of this section of dialogue and his gradual building of his dystopian picture of a eugenically controlled human race. His speeches are slowly built up, with pauses and ellipses, and work as a satirical attack on Nick's work. It would have been good to see answers that contrasted that dialogue structure with Nick's short phrases of growing discomfort and protest and Martha's repeated 'Hunh!' of mock approval.

Question 8

William Shakespeare: *Richard III*

- (a) There were few responses to this task, but candidates knew the importance of Queen Margaret's prophecies in the play, some pointing out Shakespeare's manipulation of historical fact in order to include her character. She was sometimes seen as a witch-like character, but her prescience was noted, some answers suggesting that she provides a structure to the second part of the play, where her foretellings come true.
- (b) It was an interesting feature in some of the few answers to this question that they contained more commentary on the ghosts who have just vanished as the extract begins than on the extract itself. The ghosts are, of course, an important context for the scene, but candidates should ensure their primary focus is on the selected passage. Stronger responses took careful note of the shifts in Richard's thoughts, marked by contradictions, caesurae, dashes, exclamation and question marks, showing his unease, conscience and admission of guilt for the first time in the play. His admission of fear to Ratcliffe in the closing part of the extract was seen as significant, and a foreshadowing of his defeat to come.

Question 9

Robert Bolt: *A Man for All Seasons*

- (a) *A Man for All Seasons* is proving to be a popular text, but there were few responses to this question. Those who did attempt it tended to describe the main characters without discriminating which ones were church leaders. Stronger answers measured the relevant characters against the morality which their religious allegiance suggests they should uphold.
- (b) There were many more responses here and candidates often showed a sense of engagement with More and hostility to Cromwell at this stage in the play. A number of answers made good use of Cromwell's long speech with its rhetorical questions, exclamations and stresses. Some perceptive comments showed an appreciation of how the stage directions convey Cromwell's progressive loss of control in the face of More's calm certainty, arguing for a resulting audience empathy with More. There was interesting comment too on Rich's appearance at the end of the extract, including not only his costume, but that he has to be reminded to add 'So help me God.' While some candidates slipped into story-telling and summary, there were strong responses which demonstrated a real sense of how dialogue and action work in the theatre to affect an audience's judgements.

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 8695/93

Poetry, Prose and Drama

Key Messages

- All questions are a test of literary knowledge and understanding and as such, must be informed by an analysis of the text.
- Candidates succeed best when they use secure detailed references and quotations to support points.
- The most successful answers clearly focus on the author's choices of language and literary methods, and the effects these have on a reader.
- Answers to **(b)** passage questions should examine the selected extract in detail and demonstrate an awareness of the wider text.

General Comments

There was an interesting variety in the texts which proved popular across the three time zoned papers, but throughout the range, examiners saw examples of excellent, detailed and informed writing on all of the texts. Within the different genres there was evidence of thoughtful and precise analysis of poetic methods across the range of poetry texts, and some candidates showed impressively comprehensive knowledge of their chosen novels. Amongst those choosing drama on the Language and Literature question papers, there was evidence of an informed appreciation of the dramatic genre and the plays were understood as performances on stage. There were, though, many answers which were hampered by summary and paraphrase. In such responses, knowledge was often shown, but demonstration of understanding of the writers' choices of language, imagery and form was missing. It is very important that answers balance knowledge and understanding.

Question Specific Comments

Question 1

Seamus Heaney: *District and Circle*

- (a) There were few responses to this question, but Examiners saw writing on such poems as 'The Helmet', 'The Turnip-Snedder', 'A Shiver' and 'A Clip'. Successful answers looked closely at the physical sensations and the ways they are described. There were particularly careful answers looking at the preparation of the body for the swing of the sledge hammer in 'A Shiver' and the minute details of observation and feeling in 'A Clip', evoking the childhood experience.
- (b) In 'proficient' answers candidates' discussion focused on the central idea of the poem; demonstrating an understanding that, despite physical changes in a place through evolution and development, its history and memories make it a special place, as recalled by Heaney in his childhood wartime experience of the aerodrome. Some candidates, however, found it difficult to sort out the time sequence in the poem; the very specific cultural markers of the Second World War airfield compared with those of a modern industrial estate need knowledge rather than guesswork for those unsure of the poem, but are important locators of time and place, as are the more sensory 'smell of daisies and hot tar'. There were some thoughtful comments on change and the narrator's more mature recognition of the significance of the woman's 'Back-stiffening'.

Question 2

Wilfred Owen: *Selected Poems*

- (a) Candidates took various routes in response to this question. Some looked at a war poem alongside a poem centred on a different subject matter, to show the range of interest in Owen's poetry. Others considered different aspects of war, such as the soldiers' experience and the portrayal of politicians responsible for war, while another group of candidates looked at war itself and its aftermath. There were some effective essays on Owen's pre-war poetry compared with his poetry of battle. Examiners accepted and rewarded any of these approaches, as long as some consideration of 'range' was apparent in the discussion. Candidates who identified their chosen range, chose appropriate poems and structured their essays in this way did well. Less successful candidates wrote rather generally about war poetry, occasionally referring to a wide selection of poems without actively demonstrating what 'range' they were looking at. Inevitably with this question, nearly every poem in the selection was discussed by at least one candidate.
- (b) This was, perhaps, the most popular question on the entire paper; examiners saw an enormous number of answers on 'The Send-off'. Candidates with developed poetic awareness did very well; many were able to comment effectively on the effects of sibilance, alliteration, oxymoron, symbolism and imagery. Even less confident candidates were able to show understanding of how the structure of the poem conveys the contrast between the departure of the soldiers and their return, noting the hesitant rhetorical question and the subsequent answer with the poignant repetition of 'few' and the sinister connotations of 'creep', 'silent' and 'half-known'. The strongest responses explored the impassive reactions of 'Dull porters' and the 'casual tramp', coupled with perceptive comments on the personification of 'unmoved, signals nodded, and a lamp/Winked to the guard', with one memorable comment that 'man and inanimate object combine in a conspiracy of silence and rejection'.

Question 3

Songs of Ourselves

- (a) Interestingly, there were comparatively few responses to questions on the anthology on this paper, and very few answers to this particular question. Where it was done, though, it tended to be handled confidently, with 'Sonnet 11', 'Sonnet 61', 'When I Was Fair And Young' and 'They Flee From Me, That Sometime Did Me Seek' being particularly popular. Candidates' essay structure usually benefited from the comparison, with clear exploration of the similarities and differences in poets' treatment of love's torments. The strongest responses showed detailed knowledge and understanding of how poets shape their meanings, using particular diction, evocative imagery and careful structure.
- (b) Carew's poem was the more popular choice and candidates who knew the poem well wrote successfully on aspects of technique which proved accessible. Many essays featured sharp and intelligent comments on the effects of natural imagery, structure, diction, and rhyme. Answers commented on the pattern of repetition and the progression of natural phenomena, noting that these are deployed with increasing intensity to elevate the speaker's lover. Candidates who were less well prepared tended to be restricted to summary or made assumptions that the poem has a starkly sarcastic tone.

Question 4

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: *Half of a Yellow Sun*

- (a) Candidates usually noted that the title of the book 'The World Was Silent When We Died' was Richard's title, borrowed from Madu, but that the book itself is revealed to be Ugwu's. Several responses did not fully explore 'the effects' of the inclusion of the extracts within the narrative of the novel. More confident responses considered the role Richard plays in creating the title of the book Ugwu eventually writes, with candidates recognising the significance of an authentic Igbo voice telling 'The World' about the suffering inflicted on the Igbo people – it is Ugwu's story to tell, not Richard's. Candidates also commented on the narrative complexity through which Adichie assigns a pivotal role to Ugwu as victim and perpetrator, whose work 'The World Was Silent When We Died' gives the story of Biafra a complete perspective, as it describes events in a factual, reportage style.

- (b) While some answers got sidetracked into writing an overall account of Richard's role in the Nigerian civil war, this question provoked some detailed and thoughtful responses too. More perceptive essays showed recognition of the bias of Richard's language in his article particularly in the first paragraph and explained why it was so. The second paragraph offered candidates many opportunities to comment on Richard's insecurities about being judged and found wanting, his hang-ups about his childhood and his jealousy of Madu. Adichie can be seen to expose his delusions as he imagines himself as Winston Churchill but also as the moral victor. 'Proficient' candidates considered ways in which Adichie portrays Richard as a man desperate to find a role and be accorded respect, even if it means grovelling to His Excellency. Subtle responses noted that Adichie's tone in the passage invites both admiration and mockery of Richard.

Question 5

EM Forster: *A Passage to India*

- (a) The relationship between Fielding and Aziz is of central importance in the novel and many candidates were certainly ready to write about it. Less alert candidates took the chance to recount the development and decline of the relationship without closely reading the question, leading to general, unspecific responses. More successful answers used the cues in the question, including the quotations, in order to discuss the significance of the relationship. This led them towards the political as well as the personal aspect of the question, moving from collar studs and photographs of Aziz's wife to an exploration of the possibility of friendship between an Indian and Englishman considered at the end of the novel. Most answers showed very detailed knowledge of the text, which continues to be enormously popular.
- (b) This was a passage which provided plenty of opportunities for candidates to demonstrate an appreciation of narrative technique. Stronger candidates were able to note the effects of the omniscient narrator's initial description of the ordinariness of the caves through adjectives such as 'convenient', 'unattractive', 'bland' and 'bald'. Some noted the use of the abrupt simile 'sucked in like water down a drain' or the final sentence of the first paragraph as turning points from which the narrative shifts to Mrs Moore's perceptions of the cave. Some candidates noted the use of long sentences listing various happenings as effective in conveying Mrs Moore's responses. Many noted the significance of the whole extract as marking a change in the formerly content character as 'she went mad, hitting and gasping like a fanatic', language which hitherto could never have been applied to Mrs Moore. Several commented on the significance of this as the start of her decline and disillusionment, leading to her ultimate death.

Question 6

Stories of Ourselves

- (a) Candidates attempting this question made effective use of stories such as 'The Prison', 'Elephant', 'The Enemy' and 'Sredni Vashtar'. Less successful answers described the relationships in question, often relying on narrative summary. More successful responses explored ways in which the narrative reveals the unhappiness, how it is communicated, and how it informs the reader's understanding of the story. Essays exploring 'The Enemy' focused on the dynamic between mother and son to illustrate the characters' unhappiness. The aunt's mean-spirited treatment of Conradin in 'Sredni Vashtar' was explored by many, who had some sympathy with his subtle but deadly means of revenge. Several candidates wrote well on both content and style in considering the burden that every relationship places on the narrator of 'Elephant' to cause his unhappiness.
- (b) Examiners saw some very strong responses to this question, where better answers addressed the stylistic and thematic aspects of the passage fully. They considered the use of pathetic fallacy in the autumnal atmosphere and setting; as well as the shifting thoughts filtered through the perplexed stream of consciousness. Focus on the task topics of 'change' and 'the passing of time' was maintained steadily. More subtle responses noted that the opening paragraph focuses on the concept of time standing still, with phrases such as 'nothing was changed', 'a moment since her face had been reflected' and 'her name seemed to hang in the air'. The second paragraph however, suggests time passing through references to 'autumnal fields' and 'dusk was falling'. In the final section of direct speech the question of time and change is explicitly discussed between the two characters, leading to the heart of the story. The passage demanded careful reading and writing which explored its details and nuances.

Question 7

Edward Albee: *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*

- (a) There were very few responses to this question, which invited candidates to examine Albee's challenging combination of aggression and humour in the play.
- (b) There were very few responses to this passage, which invited candidates to consider how an audience might respond to Martha's account of the episode with George, George's unseen entrance and the device of the comic gun. It would have been good to see closer analysis of both the dialogue and the stage directions.

Question 8

William Shakespeare: *Richard III*

- (a) There were very few responses to this question, though there were some answers which showed detailed knowledge of Richard's soliloquies. Some considered different types of victimhood, comparing his presentation of himself to Lady Anne, with his soliloquy after the ghosts have left him.
- (b) The passage was more popular, with some developed comments on Margaret's cursing language and bitter tone which emerges from the exclamations and questions as she details Richard's wrongdoings. Their exchange of insults was a key focus for many candidates, while some thoughtful responses charted the shift in power in the scene, Margaret dominating the first 49 lines before Richard interrupts her progression and turns her curses aside in l.55 before being supported by Hastings, Rivers and Dorset. Some noticed the irony of support for Richard from these characters, considering later developments in the play.

Question 9

Robert Bolt: *A Man for All Seasons*

- (a) There were very few responses to this question, which required candidates to consider ways in which Bolt dramatises historical events for a modern audience.
- (b) There were very few responses to this passage. It demanded close commentary on the arguments between More and Roper about law and morality within the domestic setting; exemplified by the discussion of food at the end of the extract. The involvement of More's wife and daughter, and their responses to the argument, were crucial to the question's focus on the tensions between personal and public life.